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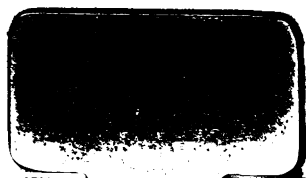


*George Duffield A.M.*

In tali nunquam lassat venatio sylva.

A.D. 1884.

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ST. PETER THE APOSTLE.

# SCRIPTURE BIOGRAPHY.

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BY THE  
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*FIRST SERIES.*

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# SCRIPTURE BIOGRAPHY.

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## INTRODUCTION.

BOTH the delight and the profit which are derived from the study of biography have been freely acknowledged by the consenting testimony of the literature of every nation. It were wonderful had it been otherwise. For the men, whose lives are deemed worthy of the study and attention of mankind, have been exceptions to the common rule of mediocrity in one or more particulars of their character, to which they are indebted for a place in the history of their country. These have thrust them forward in bright relief from the midst of the general surrounding darkness, and, according to the number and degree of these, they stand out, one with but the head, another with but an arm, or even a leg, one with but the bust, another with the whole front protruded into the full light of fame and glory. But this imperfect view, and such only it is which history can supply, serves but to excite our curiosity, and bestir ourselves to examine what still remains of those figures plunged in the obscurity and shade in which we ourselves are found. We like to feel and

handle, and find that here they after all resemble but ourselves, when traced to our own condition of privacy and seclusion. Here we meet them with all our own weaknesses and unsteadiness. We see how men who achieved such mighty deeds in the world, on such critical occasions, did things which we do every day, and perhaps in our more ignoble feelings we are unconsciously gratified in discovering that they did them no better, nay, even worse : that they paid a price, and a dear price too, for their possession of fame, and that our solid happiness would be ill-exchanged for their barren splendour. But we are moved also by nobler feelings. We wish to arrive at the germ of those admired characters, to trace the connection between their private and their public life, so that we may learn to improve what we already have in common with them into that which they have peculiarly to themselves. For this purpose we must follow them beyond the distraction of their attendant crowd, and bustle, and pomp, and gaze at them alone as at some celebrated single statue. There is also felt a calm and pleasing melancholy in having tracked them home afar from the noise and tumult of their fame. We sit as it were at the silent and lonely fountain, lapped in moss and rock, of some celebrated stream whose course we have painfully traced amid broad plains, and seen it watering fields of battle, girding fortresses whose sieges are still thundering in history, encircling, with opportune bays cities of busy trade, and reflecting in his waters the domes and spires of the palaces and cathedrals of noisy capitals. When we have thus traced even a warrior like Marlborough home, how

soft, how quiet, how holy (we might almost say) seems the spot, compared with the noisy course of public life through which we have followed him. Such are the duties and such the advantages of biography in general ; as where it takes for its subject the characters which by their pen or by their sword have created, maintained, or overthrown the glories of the empires of Greece, of Rome, of Italy, of France, of England, of all the perishable kingdoms of this perishable world. What then must they be when we come to a close study of the characters which stand illustrious in the annals of the everlasting kingdom of Christ, of the Church of God ? Here, to further our loftiness of contemplation, we have the builders of an eternal empire, we have kings, priests, prophets, apostles, and mighty men of valour, especially raised up by God, and sent into the field clad in the whole armour of his light. Here to engage our interest, we arrive at the source of events which are proceeding unwearied in their prophesied and prophetic course at this very hour, by which we are equally affected as they, and influenced both in this life, and in the life to come. Our own salvation is in question, our own redemption is in debate. To amuse us we have infinite variety set before us, men in all ranks of life, in all stages of society, in all circumstances of trial, the fisherman Peter, the king David, the faithful John, the traitor Judas, the patriarch Abraham, the Jewish Hezekiah, the Christian Paul. And yet all these in their several ages and stations, however far removed asunder, whether by two thousand years, or by all the distance between the slave and the king, are seen conspiring in

their variety of action and means to one end, converging to the same loveliness and sublimity of character, moved as they were by that one eternal invisible Spirit which came down upon them from heaven. By the effects of this certain but unseen agent we are affected in our mental eye much in the same way as by those of the wind in our bodily, which here ripples the calm water, there raises the stormy wave, here bows the cedars, shakes the towers, carries on their course the snow, the sleet, and the rain, and here blows up the fallen corn, scatters through the air the downy-feathered seeds, and makes every blade and leaf to dance with gladness. But above all, to encourage us here, we have the certainty that none of their more estimable excellences are hopelessly removed beyond our attainment. They are even promised to us if we will but strive to attain. As members of God's Church we are entitled as well as they to the sanctifying riches of its treasury, may clothe ourselves from its vestry with the same robes of righteousness, be girt from its armoury with the same sword of the Spirit, and equally with them may in our day of trial stop the mouths of lions, and extinguish the power of fire<sup>1</sup>. In all that have been we see what we ourselves may be, if we will but have resolution to begin and perseverance to proceed. We also may be ready servants and faithful honoured agents when God shall determine in his purposes to call us forth to stand in the battle-array of his saints. Cold indeed must be that heart which does not glow with a generous

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. 33.

warmth on such a contemplation, which does not exult in the prospect of standing unshaken where confessors and martyrs have stood unshaken before. And perverse indeed must be that understanding which can for a moment undervalue the employment of analyzing the characters of men who are our brethren of the same family of God, have been cast in one likeness, have received with us the same inheritance both of flesh and spirit, have looked forward to the same end. The study of their minds therefore is the study of our own. And to stimulate us here, we have proposed to us the necessity both of fighting and of continuing the fight to the end. On the field of battle we were born, and on the field of battle we must die. The crown of glory, or the manacles of eternal slavery await us, and the conduct of our predecessors will serve us as a guide towards the attainment of the one and the avoiding of the other, will inspire us with a noble courage or with a wholesome fear.

These several advantages indeed extend to all sacred biography, however far advanced in time beyond the records of Scripture. But even as restricted to Scripture they are in no way diminished. Perhaps the peculiarity of the Jewish national character gives them greater force and point. This peculiarity is a tenacity of resolution, which exercised in its worst extreme, is that stiff-neckedness which God so often and so severely rebuked both by reproach and punishment, and put forth in its better, was that heroic resolution, that unconquered perseverance which enabled the Maccabees to maintain God's altars undefiled, supported Daniel against the wrath of the most powerful mo-

narch on earth, and confirmed the apostles, under God's grace, in preaching his word uninterruptedly, unawed by kings, or governors, or councils, or synagogues. The Roman, who could ill brook to stay and understand any thing which offered resistance to his lordly will, termed this a blind and stupid obstinacy. The disgusting fanaticism which distinguished their last revolt against his tyranny was but too well adapted to confirm this view. Yet we may herein discover the groundwork of a noble character, and its various modifications, effected by God's various gifts of grace, supply a fruitful topic not only of curiosity and admiration, but of wonder, and thanksgiving, and blessing, at the exceeding efficacy with which the Holy Spirit works upon the heart. How seldom (alas, how very seldom) in turning over the pages of heathen history, do we see the national fickleness and vain-glory of the Greek overcome by steadiness and solidity of principle, and even then the thing is done with an ostentatious air, with a theatrical effort, with the grimace of a complacent consciousness, which of itself confesses how far removed it was from his natural character. How seldom too do we find the cold selfish sternness of the Roman relaxing its clotted mass, and melting into the milk of charity and human kindness. Yet in Scripture history how continually are we at once instructed and delighted at beholding the inert lump of Jewish obstinacy and passiveness here refined by the Spirit's heavenly fire into adventurous enterprise, ardent sublime courage, wise well-considered perseverance, or there softened by the dew of celestial grace into most tender love, most enchanting

sweetness. The writings and actions of David finely illustrate this twofold modification of the original and fundamental principle. This element we should carefully bear in mind in our study of any Jewish character. Even as we see it exhibited by the sons of Israel at this day, we cannot but pause to reflect upon it, accomplished as it has, and accomplishing as it is, the prophecies concerning his nation, and we cannot but respect it, when we remember what glorious fruit it once bore, and hope, through faith in God's promises, that it will bear again. Surely as the Greek wrote for fame, as the Roman fought for empire, so the Jew suffered for religion. This advantage in the subject of Scripture biography is, however, counterbalanced in part by a disadvantage in the materials, especially as regards the Old Testament. The histories of the earlier nations are the histories of the lives of men, and yet are not biographies. Thus the history of Israel is comprised under the narrative of the lives of the patriarchs, of Moses, of Joshua, of the Judges, (as of Samson), and of Samuel, and of the Kings. But the public exploits of these men form of course the chief materials of the history, and their private life comes out mostly but incidentally, and in close connection with the public events which it influenced. Public life and private life are almost one and the same in early and simple times. It is not until civilization has made much advance, until the storms of public life grow too severe for luxury and enjoyment, or for innocence and self-improvement, until orators and poets, catching the spirit of their day, adorn with their language, and fling a charm around home, and fields, and solitude, that

private life is studiously sought in contradistinction to public, and that its events are deemed worthy of commemoration. Then some public character, like Cicero, writing to his friends from his retreat, unbosoms himself and unveils his home to all posterity. Or some professed author, like Suetonius, gathers up the anecdotes of the private hours of those whose history is that of their country. But we have none such as these to help us to the biography of the characters of the Old Testament, except David, who combining the king and hero with the author, has let us into the secrets of his bosom. The writings of Solomon throw but little light upon his privacy. The only pure specimen (as far as it goes) of biography is the history of Ruth, and this should never be told but as it has been told. We should seem to have better means towards a biography of the characters of the New Testament. The chief of them have left writings, and we have anecdotes relating to them told us by succeeding writers. Almost all, however, of these advantages vanish away when we come to look nearer. Those writings tell us indeed (especially of St. Paul), more of their authors than his sermons do of Jeremy Taylor, because they are letters. But then they are written (with five exceptions, two of which are on public matters) to bodies of men, and not to individuals, and therefore reflect but little of the individuality of the author. And those writers, where they are not traced to Scripture, have given so legendary a cast to their accounts, that it is seldom safe for the most part, or reverent to mix them with scriptural documents. Thus limited in his resources, the writer of Scripture biography must

be content with deducing the private character from the public, with adapting that character by means of a comment to our own circumstances, with thus bringing it home from the palace, from the temple, from the camp, to our own hearths. These are serious difficulties. Lives thus written cannot be made to afford that interest which arises from the underplot of home ; we miss those manifold and minute cords by which we can draw to our bosom characters of the most distant times and places, and give them our fellow feeling. They must be written too with a continual caution against error, with a careful bridle upon the imagination, which is ever longing to push into some individuality through the generality of the text, and above all with an incessant guard against the fondness of supplying the want of text by a detail of effects which are indeed deducible, but not necessary to be deduced, from some assigned cause. Thus the writer is liable to a coldness, and naked statement of matter of fact, which detract still more from the interest of his work. Add to all this, that the characters and events are so familiar to the reader already, that the detail, when the original is brief, will seem made up of impertinent additions, where it is minute, will appear deficient, and the difficulty of the treatment of the subject will be duly appreciated.

It is not with the purpose of magnifying the labour of the work that these observations have been made, but of pleading excuse for imperfect instruction and defective amusement. The subject is capable of powerful handling, and may well demand all the resources both natural and acquired of him who takes it in hand. It supplies a channel of weighty instruction,

of varied information, and may awake the careless or self-satisfied by presenting in a new and alluring light what they had hitherto beheld with the indifference of long familiarity. It may instil indirectly what they would reject if offered directly, it may exhibit to them by means of facts what they would not listen to in the shape of doctrines. Great therefore is the writer's responsibility, and he needs every excuse which the difficulty of adequately treating such a subject supplies.

## ADAM.

B. C. 4004—3074.

THE history of the first man is briefly told, and its few events have been familiar to us from our childhood. But our mature vigour of mind is baffled when it would endeavour to sort and put into distinct shape the various considerations and feelings which throng into head and heart as soon as ever we take it up for our special contemplation. We are arrived at the fountain head of all that we think, feel, or know ; we are come to the mystery of the introduction of evil into the world ; we are brought into the company of a being like ourselves, but which has ceased ever since to exist upon earth, even perfect man : we are led to think upon the good and the bad in our nature, and to mourn over the ruin of the one, and the victory of the other : and we close the account with a melancholy acknowledgment of a degradation in our rank of being. Our crest of human pride is beaten down, and God alone is exalted in that day.

On the sixth day of the creation was Adam made, and placed in Paradise, or the Garden of God. He was perfect man. All his outward sensations therefore were to be agreeable. So God surrounded him in this garden with every thing delightful to sense,

with trees bearing fruit pleasant to sight, and good for food, while instead of uncomfortable rain, a mist reeked up from earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. This garden he was appointed to keep and dress, and was thus provided with necessary and agreeable exercise for his bodily powers, without the pain of toil, or the pangs of carefulness. For those powers ever fresh in an immortal body, and never enfeebled or in peril of being enfeebled by sickness, held the ground in such conscious complete unendangered mastery, that no thought for the future could interrupt his contentment. Thus was he outwardly perfect. On this point we can enter somewhat into his bliss, for few there are who have not had some bright though brief glimpses of it. Few have not had some hours, perhaps days, when health of body and mind, and security from care, has been answered to from without, and some peculiarly invigorating state of the air, with brightness of sky, and beauty and loveliness of scenery, has raised their spirits far above their common tone, and amid an indescribable peacefulness and calm of joy, they have felt mere animal existence to be an inestimable gift of God. But on the point of his inward perfection who alas, shall judge? Here we are all ruin, so as never to have a single moment's enjoyment of it. But still a ruin will give some notion of the stateliness of the perfect fabric, and we may from the fragments make out the height of the tower, the length and breadth of the sanctuary, the strength of the wall, and the beauty of the sculpture. This perfection consisted in the mutual dependence and entire harmony of all his thoughts and affections, all being

in complete subjection to the mastery of his will, and that will one with the will of the Creator who gave it, from the principle of love to the gracious Giver of all. Thus was man made in the image of God, even as a genuine son resembles his father. He was as St. Luke calls him, the son of God, coming by immediate birth from his hands, without intervening taint or blemish. To such a being God deputed the sovereignty of earth, and gave him dominion over every living creature, and the use of every herb and tree. But it seemed not good to God that man should be alone. He therefore created him a help-mate, made from his rib, taken out while he was sleeping, and brought her to him: and Adam named her "woman." And God blessed them both, and said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth, and subdue it." But he also, when he put them into the Garden of Eden, to dress it and keep it, and eat freely of its fruit, excepted one tree. "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," he said, "thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." We can imagine no being, however exalted, and nearer to God than ourselves, of which we can conceive a necessary incapability of sinning. Some exalted natures had already sinned when man was put into the garden. In this tree then lay the trial of man. But where was the weak point on which the tempter may assail him? Where could he find an entrance for his wedge into the well-compacted system of perfect man? He looked narrowly and long at every joint of his armour, and at last found the vulnerable point in that regard for self which

was a necessary instinct in a creature subject to wants, and obliged to supply them by his own means, however easy those may be. If this principle of self-love, as yet in due subjection to the love of God, could be raised so as to contest with it for superiority, then the balance of perfection would be overthrown, and men would be undone. The tempter had two ways open to him here; he might assail through the appetites either of the body or of the mind, his victim may be allured to taste of the forbidden fruit from a glowing description either of its delicious taste, or of its wonderful effects in imparting power to the mind: there could be no long doubt as to the preferable of these two methods. By the former, the tempter must come at once upon the gross and palpable, and would therefore be immediately discovered, and spurned as offering an insult, and loathed for his meanness. But by the latter he could make gradual and insidious approaches, he could insensibly prepare his way by artful flattery, increasing it ever as it was received, and could thus excite self-love to the necessary point before alarm could be taken. Meanwhile he would be raising that rebellious spirit of discontent and sense of injury, ever attendant on an excited degree of self-love, taking the place of the love withdrawn from God to ourselves; after this he might securely make the naked proposition, and say, "Ye shall not surely die: for God knoweth that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Here therefore he attacked, and here he prevailed, and here has ever since been his most

certain point of attack. Self-admiration puts man off the guard which the intellect requires, quite as much as the senses; here the wise and the good, who are safe on the point of bodily appetites, are caught at last. Here he made his main attack upon our Saviour himself. Thus man lost the controlling principle of his will, and that will once diverging from God's will, all the previous harmony of his constitution was broken up. It is of no importance what the sin was, whether small or great; to him sin had no degrees, if an act were sinful at all, that is, ever<sup>t</sup> so little discordant with the will of God, it was equally ruinous with the most desperate of those which have accomplished the utter ruin of any of his miserable descendants. Even in our present corrupt nature we have something left by which to appreciate this. Characters possessing any virtue in a signal degree, if they once give way ever so little on that point, rush almost immediately to the opposite extreme of vice. A chaste woman never falls but to be the most profligate of her sex; and thus the world is sometimes surprised from virtuous characters, with daring vices whose previous absence it superficially and uncharitably ascribes to an artfully managed hypocrisy.

In the moment that the irrevocable deed was done, Adam found himself a sinner. He felt the miserable change at once. The frank and upright love of God was exchanged for a slavish crouching fear. Alas, he now indeed knew evil as well as good: and that he had gained the one at the expence of the other. In false shame, he and his partner clothed their nakedness, in which innocence had seen no

harm. How debased, how degraded, how lost, must he have appeared in his own eyes. How ungrateful, how presumptuous, how infatuated a rebellion had he engaged in against his gracious Maker. He had made himself a follower of that fallen angel who had dared to raise his standard against the Most High. In that class of accursed creatures, he must henceforward be reckoned. The thoughts of the penalty made his sin more hideous still, and what notion could he have of any remission of it, who had in the tempter an example before his eyes of sin never pardoned, and never to be pardoned. How dreadful must have been the wound of these feelings to a creature which a moment before had been innocent. Shame, remorse, self-accusing, self-excusing, perplexity, loathing, fear of death, despair, and all the armoury of mental agony brought its weapons upon his soul, with an acuteness of which we can form no notion. Their edge came upon him fresh and sharp, while it has been blunted by long use upon his posterity. While he was in this state, the voice of his injured benefactor, of his despised Lord and Maker, and sustainer, the voice even of God, was heard, summoning him before him. He had ever formerly run to the summons with joy, as to one of the highest delights and privileges of his being. But now he found it the dreaded moment of the consummation of his misery. He fled and hid himself. He knew it was vain to try to flee from God. But such is the stupifying effect of sin. Sin is the father of folly, and the sense of guilt usurps it over all our other senses. Before the inevitable judge the three rebels were forced to appear. It was the

first day of judgment which had shone upon earth : a fearful prelude and prototype of the last. Adam first heard sentence pronounced upon the serpent. He heard him cursed of God, degraded from his rank of an upright posture to go upon his belly, and eat the dust of the earth, and condemned to feel in himself and in his seed, the painful effects of enmity from the woman and her seed : he was to bruise man's heel, but man should bruise his head. Here was a fearful example before Adam. How horrible the thoughts of his own degradation to a lower state of beings, to walk the earth as a four-footed beast, or perhaps to cleave to it with his belly, as the serpent. The last clause, however, gave him some light. He next heard the sentence of Eve. To her the blessing of, "multiply, be fruitful, replenish the earth," was accompanied with the burden of the curse of the pangs of child-birth. Thus he found that pain and sorrow were to be introduced into the world, hitherto so full of pure delight. Last came his own sentence. The ground whence his food came was cursed for his sake. It was stricken with barrenness ; he was to eat of it in sorrow all the days of his life, and he was to gain a painful subsistence from it by the sweat of his brow, until he returned unto it : for from it he had been originally taken. Here was indeed a sentence of degradation past upon our first parent, the consummation of which was, that he was expelled from the rank of immortal beings, was to be lowered down, not to an inferior animal state, but down to the very inanimate dust, whence he had been taken. We cannot approach to any thing like

an adequate idea of the horror entertained of death by an immortal creature. If we will but consider how dreadful is the shock of horror to us at the bare thought of any thing contrary to our nature befalling us, we may discover a small element of the overwhelming horror of death to an immortal being. How then must Adam's soul have shrunk from it. God however did not inflict it immediately, and in the sentence of the serpent's degradation, Adam was enabled to discover the promise of his own eventual restoration, through one of his own seed. Here both he and his children down to Abraham, saw their first deliverance from sin and death. Yet was death to be undergone, its terrors hung over him, and from that moment the life of man was in jeopardy every hour.

Man was now quite an altered being. Pain and sorrow were his immediate, death his final lot. The garden of Eden, which flung forth nothing but delight to the senses, and whose culture was a pleasure, was now an unfit residence for Adam and Eve. Nor could they be trusted there any longer, after having so shamefully betrayed the confidence placed in them. They were expelled, therefore, and the eastern entrance of the garden guarded against them by Cherubims with a flaming sword. They were turned out upon the waste wide earth, to gather from it a painful subsistence, and to break that holy undivided leisure which they once had for spiritual contemplation by the incessant toil of warding off hunger, and thirst, and heat, and cold. Their earthly wants, alas, were now much more clamorous than their heavenly. The body, the mortal body, was calling on

them continually to take care for its sustenance, and save it from the dreaded death; and the voice of the spirit was weak before its loud importunity. One day provided for, still left the next unprovided for; and toil as he would, Adam could never be sure against the wants of the future. Thus was eaten for the first time the bread of carefulness, and here outside the eastern gate of Eden, commenced that life which has ever since been the lot of fallen man.

These were the first fruits of sin. Now came the harvest. Amidst the penal pangs of child-birth, Eve brought forth Cain, and Abel afterwards. Both father and mother rejoiced no doubt in this addition to their society, and in the exercise of the parental affection, now first felt. But how was their joy mixed with sorrow, when they reflected that their own sin had deprived these two beings of innocence and immortality. They had wasted a large and magnificent patrimony, and entailed beggary and shame upon their children. In these two first offsprings of his loins, Adam beheld the full extent of the miserable effects of his transgression. The two brothers were sacrificing (probably in observation of the Sabbath). God, by some sign which he gave at such times in those days, accepted Abel's offerings, but refused Cain's. Instead of penitential sorrow for his sins under the divine displeasure, Cain was filled with all the devilish rage of jealousy against Abel, and rose up against him and slew him. Here in the innocent Abel, Adam first saw death, a dreadful sight at any time, but much more so now, to the first man, to him who had been immortal, who

most probably through freedom from sickness had no notion of its appearances, and who was himself the original cause of it. Alas, many of his sons since have had to weep over the remains of beloved children, whom some imprudence of their own has indirectly deprived of life. In the murderer Cain, Adam beheld with horror and astonishment the precipitate course of sin—how it could reach the goal almost in the instant of starting. What must have been his torture of mental anguish, when in Cain's conduct he saw the image of his own disobedience. He had diligently trained him in the ways of God; he had been ever stimulating him to good, by recounting the gracious promise of the recovery of eternal life; he had been ever deterring him from evil by detailing his own fall and its melancholy consequences; he had been commending, exhorting, entreating, with all the authority and affection of a father: yet Cain disobeyed, even as he himself, in despite of His display of love and power, had disobeyed his own heavenly Father. Alas! the murder of his son was but a different shape of the sin which himself had committed. And now there was before him a lively and sure example of the manner in which it should go down, infecting all his posterity, showing itself among their thousands in a thousand horrible shapes, the conception of which baffled his imagination. In Cain too he beheld the first complete aversion from God. It was in God's very presence, amid prayers and offerings addressed to him, that Cain slew his brother. And now, in dogged impenitence, he went out from the presence of the Lord. He quitted the spot and household where God had vouchsafed his presence

at his altar, and not caring that it should be vouchsafed any where else, betook himself on his own ways, and went to another country, called the land of Nod. Our two first parents were thus reduced to their former solitude. One son had been lost to this life; the other but too probably to the next life also. How different was this solitude from their former! What a crowd of sad thoughts and horrible remembrances intruded into it! What a melancholy interchange of reflections and feelings by day! what feverish dreams and visions of the lost and departed by night! Alas! what a contrast to their solitude of Paradise. The only other spiritual beings of which they then could think, were God and his holy angels; now were added to the number the murdered and the murderer, and the tempter. In every region of reflection their sin met them, and brought sorrow and guilt before them, where formerly they had seen but bliss and innocence.

Cain began the first entire separation of man from God, and in him too began the distinction of the godly from the ungodly. Happy had it been for the world had this distinction been kept up. It was done away, and brought on the visitation of the flood. Adam lived not to see this fatal re-union. But he lived to see one half of his posterity living in utter forgetfulness and alienation from God, and producing shape after shape, in horrible variety, from the fruitful womb of his original, falling-off. For a long period of years Cain and his children were his only posterity: what a heart-rending prospect lay before him here! How must he have groaned in anguish, and floated his bed with tears, and called incessantly

on God with ejaculations of repentance, and prayers for mercy, when the thought came upon him of having replenished earth with such a race; when he saw that the blessing of, "be fruitful and multiply," was already become a curse, and terminated in the fruitfulness and multiplication of a race of defiers of God, apostates from his faith, and open rebels to his will. While he was thus grieved, and burdened, and bowed to the dust, God had pity upon him, and after he had lived 130 years, gave him another son in Seth. Cheered with this light of comfort, renewed in hope, and trusting that he would replace the loss of his beloved and godly Abel, he named the child Seth (or, placed). In his line he may look for his promised Redeemer, every hope of whom seemed to be frustrated in the unholy seed of Cain. Nor was he disappointed here. Seth trod in the footsteps of Abel, and from him proceeded a race of spiritual priests of God, in every way contrasted with the progeny of Cain. The anguish which changed his countenance when he looked upon the elder branch of his offspring, gave way to smiles of joy when he turned it upon the younger. In the former he saw with terror and abhorrence the murderer Lamech, born too truly in his father's image, and Tubal-Cain, the artificer of brass and iron, the furnisher of ready implements of murder, whose invention has been hailed with the curses of mankind, and sung in strains of abhorrence by the poets of every civilized nation. But from this picture he could now turn to one of a very different subject, and with the groveling, the worldly-minded, the ungodly digger of the dark bowels of the earth, and workman of the forge,

he could now contrast the heavenly-minded Enoch, who walked with God, and within half a generation after his death, displayed to mankind a palpable proof of their immortality by being translated alive into eternal bliss and glory. This posterity did not forsake him as Cain's had done: it clung to God, and abode where his covenanted altar stood. It arrayed itself in dutiful order of obedience under Adam as their patriarch; and now was Adam's soul enlarged and set free, after being so long pent up through the wickedness of Cain's sons. For this pious posterity, this his faithful family, he daily mediated with God by prayer and sacrifice as their priest; to this he imparted continual instruction, pouring forth all the stores which remained of his former spiritual knowledge and feelings, to this he recounted the once tasted blessings of innocence and immortality, and stirred them up to persevere and regain the prize; and to this he detailed the melancholy history of his fall, unfolded the artful devices of the Tempter, confessed the intolerable anguish of the new state of sin, and entreated them with tears and prayers to beware of his example. And diligently he set before them the joyful hope of the Redeemer to come. This hope he so strongly impressed, that it went down through a long line of faithful successors, who carried it on ever brightening into greater and broader light and glory, by successive revelations of God, until it terminated, as a sunbeam in the sun, in the Redeemer of mankind, standing in the latter days upon the earth. A wide bow of light, spanning the abyss of darkness, connected the first and the second Adam.

Thus lived Adam, labouring with all his powers of example and preaching to undo the mischief which he had brought into the world, and comforted and comforting with the sure hope that all would be finally undone by one sprung from his own loins. The fruit of his instruction was seen in Noah, whose father Lamech sat for the first 56 years of his life at the feet of Adam. He lived not to see the fatal conjunction of the lines of Cain and Seth : he was spared the sight of the good mingling with the bad, and finally, (as evil is the stronger principle) completely corrupted, while the bad were not amended. He was spared the sight of all that preparation, and final burst of wickedness, which called down from heaven the visitation of the flood. He had numbered 930 years, and fell asleep in the sure and certain hope of the rising of the sun of righteousness, and comforted with the certainty, that although another's and not his own mortal eyes should see it, yet it would be seen upon earth, and cheer not only the living, but also fling its glorious light of blissful immortality through the silent chambers of the dead.

## NOAH.

B. C. 2948—1998.

THE sin of Adam had been transmitted down, and reached the ninth generation of his descendants, when it came to such a head, that God determined to punish mankind with a signal judgment. We cannot wonder at so deep and universal corruption, when we consider how many causes led to it. The prodigious length of man's life allowed a rapid progress in all the means of making life agreeable. Nothing was lost by remaining imperfect and undivulged at the death of the inventor. A single life sufficed to mature in one brain, and carry into practical effect what now requires many successions of men, each of which painfully recovers the clue of its predecessor. Thus luxury would advance with gigantic strides ; - but this enormous length of life, keeping death and judgment at such a distance, would inspire a recklessness of enjoyment of the present hour, of which we may somewhat judge from the conduct of ourselves, whose days are reduced to threescore years and ten. Again, it kept bad examples so long upon earth as to diffuse both far among cotemporaries, and deep into rising generations, their pernicious influence. A man from his prime to his end had the opportunity of corrupting eight succes-

sive generations<sup>1</sup>. When we consider how infinitely more powerful, as well as more common, evil example is than good, we cannot be surprised at the melancholy result which came forth at the end of about 1500 years after the murder of Abel. Bad as times have since been, they have never reached that deep and universal depravity to which the world then attained. And, thanked be God, it never can so attain again, from causes too obvious to enumerate. God however for a long time had a remnant reserved to him. The children of Seth long merited the title of sons of God, and kept aloof from the contagion of the example of the sons of Cain. But even they at last relaxed their strictness, and smitten with the fairness of the daughters of Cain, forgot the cause of the honour and glory of God in the unruliness of their desires. They may possibly have been willing dupes to a notion of drawing over the Cainites by means of their wives and connexions to the cause of godliness, and thus have flattered themselves that their own gratification was God's cause. Alas, it was not the last time that the Tempter has thus deluded and made sport of godly men. The leaven once admitted into the mass of the children of Seth soon leavened the whole. The children of godly men are notorious for going beyond all others in profligacy, if they once begin, and for obvious reasons. Accordingly, the generation sprung from this fatal connexion was distinguished by deeds of violence, by corruption of imagination, by cruelty, rapine, and wickedness, to that degree, that it repented the Lord

<sup>1</sup> The average of life being about 900, and of a generation 100.

that he had made men on the earth : all earth was corrupt before God. The giants, or mighty men of oppression, already existing of the race of Cain, were soon matched by a similar brood of monsters of the blood of Seth, and the earth was filled with violence. In the end so universal became the apostasy, that one family only out of the thousands of earth continued faithful to the Lord. In the household of Noah the son of Lamech, and tenth in descent from Adam, the lamp of the light of the Holy Spirit shone as light in a window on a dark night amidst a wide and waste moor. There alone was kept holy the Sabbath of God, thence alone arose the sweet smell of accepted sacrifice, there alone was cherished the lively hope of the promised Redeemer, and there alone was God's holy name reserved for prayer and blessing. Elsewhere it was wantonly uttered in profane swearing, cursing, and blasphemy. As far as the life-giving Spirit was concerned, the world was brought back to the early days of Adam, when himself with Eve and two sons were the only living spirits upon earth. In such a state of things God revealed himself to Noah, communicated to him his resolution of destroying mankind with the earth, and commanded him to build an ark, giving him notice of the very materials, shape, and dimensions, and telling him that it was by a flood of waters that he intended to destroy all flesh. Meanwhile, in his long-suffering he commissioned him to preach righteousness to mankind, if perchance any would repent and turn unto the Lord<sup>1</sup>. Noah immediately pro-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 20. ; 2 Pet. ii. 5., in the former passage, for the words in our Version, " which were sometime disobedient," the

ceeded to obey God's command; for 120 years, the length of a whole generation, he continued building and preaching. The Spirit of Christ was upon him. He bade men forsake their ways, and turn to the hope of their promised Redeemer. He warned them against the security of long life, for that God was already laying the axe to the root. He told them his commission and pointed to his ark, which was daily rising, plank above plank, for proof of the sincerity of his conviction. There was no salvation, he told them, unless they returned to the faith whence they had fallen away, and looked up to him to whom Adam had looked for the remission of his sins. Great must have been his sorrow for man, and great his zeal for God's daily insulted honour. How great therefore the earnestness of his preaching! He must have had friends whom he wished to rescue from impending perdition, and whom he besought with tears and prayers to give heed to him, and they would not. Some answered with coldness, some rebuked him for impertinence, some treated him with scoffs and insults, and called him a driveller or a madman. From the old and elderly, whose hearts were less accessible, he turned with better hopes to the young. But here also he met with rebuffs. Youth must then have been even more presumptuous than now: it had before it the long prospect of 800 or 900 years; they laughed no doubt at the crazy ark-builder as they called him, and asked him in derision every day, when the world was to end? and thanked him, each

Greek requires that we should read, "when they were of old time disobedient." The difference is very important in a theological view.

morning, in mockery, for the respite of another day.

Meanwhile, his ark began to tower over the whole neighbourhood, provoking the jeers of the beholders. The allotted time for repentance was now fast running out; and perhaps a few did begin to think that there was something serious in the matter. Noah on all occasions, they observed, conducted himself with exceeding wisdom and judgment; and if his was a fit of madness, it was a very long one to persist in. Some converts probably he made, whom death spared from beholding the dreadful sight of perishing parents, and brothers, and friends. But these could have been but few, since we find that at the very last he had not gained over even his own servants. How melancholy now was the sight when he passed from his own door, and came amongst crowds who he knew would shortly be swept away in awful destruction: when he entered the thronged and noisy city, and knew that very soon would be the noise of overwhelming waters there, and then solitude and silence. Day after day the godly man, vexed in his righteous soul, returned weary and faint with useless, thankless toil, to his spiritual solitude. In vain he endeavoured to extend the vineyard of God's church beyond his own door: the wild boar immediately assailed the advanced inclosure, and before evening it was rooted up. How continual must have been his struggle! In the morning he poured out his soul to God, and implored the blessing of some fruit upon the labours of the ministry of the day, and in the evening, mourned before him the impenitence of his brethren, and cried, "Lord, who hath believed our report?"

At night, his wakeful soul revolved upon the ways and means of the morrow, how and where to find the passage to the heart of this and of that friend; and then, when in the ensuing day he thought he had struck the true chord, and blessed God for it, before night it ceased to return a sound: or one, whom he had left half convinced, or at least, thinking seriously of what had been said early in the morning, was found to have relapsed into all his carelessness and unbelief when he saw him again at night. There is a certain stage of infatuation of sin in which all warning is thrown away, a judicial blindness, when they that have eyes will not see, and they that have ears will not hear. Yet what preaching could be more powerful than that of Noah's? He preached by God's especial appointment, under the immediate inspiration of the Spirit of Christ, with a conviction of approaching judgment, with a wonderful and conspicuous sign of that conviction, to brethren and friends, for whom he would gladly lay down his life. But no human voice can awaken the dead. In times of general apostasy, the mind is so depraved, so possessed of the notion of its own high powers, so bent upon self-gratification, that it recoils from every appeal made by the meekness and single-mindedness of wisdom and grace. As soon as it catches words hostile to its misnamed peace, it either springs, like the enraged tiger, to destroy its disturber, or draws in its head, and shuts itself up, like the tortoise in his shell. Accordingly, they went on building, and marrying, and being married, before the eyes of Noah, up to the moment that he entered into the ark. Those whom God was sparing the sight of the lamentable catastrophe, he was now gradually remov-

ing from earth. Lamech was taken away five years before it happened ; and at last died Methuselah, in the very year of the flood.

Great now must have been the agony of Noah. The day was almost at hand ; earth was speedily going to be the sepulchre of her children. He was taking a final leave, bidding an everlasting farewell to all his kinsmen and friends. They laughed incredulously still. One would think that Noah was going to execution, and not they. Perhaps his heart was cut in twain during these last awful moments by the apostasy of some converts, of some with whose hearts he had joined his heart, whom he had loved with that love which godliness makes so pure, so fervent, so lasting. He was now like one leaving his native land for a far-distant country. Faces that he knew and loved, spots that he delighted in, the very altars of Almighty God, were all about to vanish for ever. Never was such a change as this of Noah's. Even when they have been transplanted to an unpeopled wilderness, earth wears to men substantially the same appearance ; they still feel conscious of the existence of fellow-men, though they see them not, and return to their society is not impossible, and beyond all hope. Noah had nothing of this to look forward to : and had he laid up no treasure beyond this earth, he had been, even if saved, the most miserable of men. He could scarcely have desired exemption from the general wreck. But his treasure was laid up in heaven. He had laid up his hopes in God's merciful promises of redemption ; and he himself (or one of his sons) was now the only channel of these promises.

The future Redeemer was in his loins. On his own life now depended his eternal life.

And now the fatal order came. God appeared unto Noah, and commanded him to enter the ark with his wife, with his three sons and their wives, and with the appointed number selected from every kind of beast and bird. In a long procession by two and two, male abreast of female, the vast and varied company elected to salvation of life, entered the ark. When has the world seen such another procession? when will it see such another, until the saints elected to everlasting life, shall march to their place of eternal rest, into the heavenly ark, with their Redeemer at their head? This took place in the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the tenth day of the month. And the Lord shut them in. Here, in awful suspense, the holy family awaited the dreadful time. Perhaps their procession had moved amid a jeering and insulting crowd, whom God's hand alone prevented from laying violent hands on them; and now, from within their place of seclusion, they could overhear the sounds of wassail and merriment, continued through the night, and raised purposely to a louder key than usual in order that Noah might hear, and learn how little they regarded his warnings. Often too in the daytime, sounds would reach them of a world still noisy and busy, and the scoffs of passengers, or insults of a collected crowd, come to their ears. They threatened perhaps to hew down his ark, and pull him out. But the Lord had shut him in. This note did not last long. At the end of seven days, on the 17th day of the month, the waters of the flood came upon the earth,

for all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. For awhile, perhaps, they heard screams and shrieks of agony, and the sound of persons scaling the ark for refuge, and of knockings upon it for admission, and of well-known voices crying, "save us, or we perish." Noah could not admit them if he would. The Lord had provided for all this, when he shut him in. But the tremendous sound of rushing waters and the loud battering of the storm upon the roof and sides of the ark, soon drowned these and all other sounds. For forty days and forty nights the rains descended and the flood increased until it bore up the ark. As soon as Noah felt the vessel heave from the ground, and found it afloat, and drifting before the wind, when now the last hold of earth was gone, he no doubt called his family around him in prayer to God, who was now executing such tremendous judgment upon mankind, and so signal deliverance for themselves. He exhorted them to abide in his ways, he told them that any falling-off after such a display of mercy could hardly be recovered by renewal of his grace: that on them depended now the future relation of mankind to God: they were the salt of the earth, from which every believer was hereafter to draw his savour. He bade them make the most in spiritual meditation of this time of bodily inactivity and seclusion, and assist him in maintaining the church of God pure and holy, however visibly minished, under the face of Heaven. By this time famine was consuming what the waters had spared, and the miserable remnant was clinging to the summits of the high mountainous districts, as those of

Taurus, of Himelaya, of the Alps, of the Andes. The first ridge, the huge belt of North-western Asia, was in the neighbourhood of the ark, when it first began to float. The ark may probably drift near it. It would be reduced to a few jagged peaks scattered among the waters, and hourly sinking one after another in them. From these they may hear the wailings and groans of dying men, the moans and roarings of famishing and affrighted brutes. For many days after earth was almost covered the ark would be assailed with the wild screams and flapping wings of huge birds, seeking a resting-place there. Alas! the world would not die an easy death; many a struggle would it make until the last receptacle of life was gone. Could such frightful agonies of a whole dying world, could such a horrible visitation upon sin be ever erased from the memories of its witnesses, or ever cease to warn them with an awful lesson? And yet all was fruitless upon one of them! At length the last peak was covered, and earth gave her last dying shriek. All now was silent, except those sounds which went forth at the creation, the rushing wind and roaring water. Chaos had partly resumed his ancient reign, the world had past away, and the church of God was floating in safety, between earth and heaven, above its ruins. Around was storm and darkness, but peace and plenteousness were within; there the light of the comfort of the blessed Spirit was cheering its inmates. Such was the foretaste of that enviable state in which she has since been more than once seen, and gazed upon with admiration and awe: when amid the wreck of empires, the violence of civil commotions, amid affliction

and darkness, and death all around her, she has sailed steadily and majestically amid the storm around and the surge below, and carried the holy freight of her saints, whose every hair has been numbered, safe and rejoicing in their salvation. The Lord hath shut them in, and no one shall harm them. And while nations look unto the earth, and behold trouble, and darkness, dimness of anguish <sup>1</sup>, in her is shining the light of the Spirit, in her is dwelling the peace of God which passeth all understanding; the beginning of troubles will indeed ever procure for her mockery and insult <sup>2</sup>, as it did for the ark; but the end of them shall see her resting uninjured and triumphant, and all her mockers swept clean from earth away. In her is the only refuge from a convulsed world; may we in the day of the Lord be found amid her holy family!

By the time that the waters had reached their greatest height, they stood 15 cubits above the loftiest mountains; they prevailed for the space of 150 days. God then remembered Noah, as Scripture so beautifully and briefly expresses the peculiar care and interposition of God in his behalf, and regard for his own promise, when the ark had been so long drifting before wind and wave, and the heart of man, if unsustained by faith, must have sunk in despair at the unabated waters. He sent forth a mighty wind, so that the waters assuaged, and the fountains of the deep, and windows of heaven were stopped. At last, in the 7th month, and 17th day of the month, the bottom of the ark

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah viii. 22.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. iv. 17.

found a resting-place on a summit of Mount Ararat. When he felt the shock and heard the sound of his vessel once more settling upon earth, assuredly the patriarch celebrated the event, by calling his family around him in prayer and thanksgiving to Almighty God,—and laid before them in earnest exhortation his faithfulness regarding his promise, and the affiance which they should place in him. Every future peril must be trifling compared with that which they had now escaped; how much more then may they have faith in God, that he will interpose for their deliverance. “O my sons,” he would say, “Give thanks unto the Lord, and remember that his mercy endureth for ever.” The waters continually decreased, and by the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains peeped above them, and earth once again appeared, dripping with the chastisement of her sins, before the face of Heaven. Noah now ventured to make a small opening in the ark, and at the end of forty days sent forth through it a raven, to ascertain the state of the earth. The retiring waters would leave much animal matter amid the mud, upon which the raven would greedily feed; but his going to and fro shewed that the surface was as yet too soft to afford him a resting-place. After this he sent forth a dove: her strength and rapidity of flight well qualified her for an explorer; but she too returned: he then waited another interval of seven days, and sent forth the dove again. The number of days here mentioned, and afterwards repeated, seems to imply that it was on the sabbath that Noah, after his usual prayer and sacrifice, full of holy hope and reliance, sent forth these messengers: in the evening the dove returned

with an olive-leaf in her mouth. We must remember that the ark, being on the central ridge of Ararat, was of course at a long distance from the lower and more genial spots where the olive grew ; this indeed is declared by the absence of the dove from the ark for so many hours, bird as it is of so rapid a flight, as readily to accomplish sixty miles in the hour. When therefore the tops of the olive emerged, (and for these the dove would make, the berry being her favourite food in the East,) Noah was assured that the lower range of hills at least were emerging, and that therefore the upper range where he was, must have been sometime uncovered, and was now fast drying ;—the raven, as he would fix on the first garbage he met, would tell but of the immediate neighbourhood, and that very confined, of the ark ;—the dove assured him that a much wider range was emerged, and fast drying. On the next sabbath he sent her forth again ; she did not return. The olive-trees therefore were now so much out of water, that the bird could roost in them, unannoyed by spray, and other accidents of water around trees ; they must have stood very nearly, if not quite, out of water. Hence Noah concluded that he may shortly venture to open the ark, and walk forth. At length, in the 601st year of Noah's life, and on the first day of the first month of this new year, Noah removed the covering of the ark, and, gazing freely and uninterruptedly around, saw that the face of the ground was dry. The opening which he had previously made was probably small, and in the roof of the ark, so that he could see nothing but sky, or the distant horizon. With all his firm reliance on

God, he did not think it right to dispense with all the aids of human prudence and foresight which came from God, no less than his care and protection did ; therefore, he did not venture, after the Lord had shut him in, to expose the ark to any possible entrance of water, until well assured by every proper precaution. As he walked with God, so would he work with God, and make the best of his gifts. And as he had gone in by God's order, and God had shut him in, so he waited God's order to go out. On the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was dried, and this order came. And Noah went forth with his wife, and his sons, and the wives of his sons, and with all the beasts and the fowls which he had taken in. And thus the church of God, which had been so long in suspense between earth and heaven, once again visited earth, purified and thoroughly purged as it now was from all its former pollutions, and again fit for the heavenly visitant.

The first thing that Noah did was to re-establish her upon it in all her former visibility, by building an altar to the Lord (most probably on the sabbath). On this he offered burnt-offerings. And this sacrifice was accompanied with the spiritual sacrifice of thanksgiving, and with the spiritual incense of prayer and praise. It was a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour unto the Lord. He graciously accepted it, and decreed never more to smite any living thing as he had done. Such were the first fruits both in offering and acceptance of the harvest which followed : thus was precluded the great offering itself made upon Calvary. On re-establishing his church on the face of the earth, God pronounced upon Noah, and

his sons the blessing which he had pronounced upon Adam; "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth," he said, and proceeded to renew to them the grant of sovereignty over every living creature, and the use of every green herb.—But the latter part of the grant was now enlarged. The use of every living creature was now granted for food, provided that they ate it not with the blood or life remaining in it. Perhaps the altered constitution of man, from the altered state of the earth, required this. It, however, conveys to the reflecting mind a sad memorial of the flood, an humiliating suggestion of the sinfulness which brought destruction upon the great body of mankind, and (if it be not wrong on so solemn an occasion to borrow the language of the apostle) we eat therein our own condemnation. As it were, in admonition of the forfeit of human life, we are supported at the painful expense of the lives of our fellow-creatures. Before we can spread a feast and enlarge our hearts in joy with a friend, groans, and gasps, and cries, and struggles of agony must have been uttered by some poor innocent creature, and with this dreadful prelude we sit down. Oh! let us make a spiritual sacrifice (as slaughter has already partly made it a bodily) of such a feast, and sanctify it by humble and hearty thanksgiving, acknowledging the price at which we are fed, whether in body or in soul: in the one by the death of our fellow-creatures, in the other by the death of the Son of God. Alas! turn where we will for joy to earth or to heaven, death is its fellow, and its price. But this additional grant required from God a positive prohibition against murder. Man

formerly the mild monarch of his fellow-creatures, was now the blood-shedding despot. Like an usurper upon this earth, from which he had been for a time removed, he must maintain his existence by blood. With blood he begins, and with blood he ends his reign. Surely such familiarity with the shedding of the blood of all other kinds must make even that of his own kind less precious in his eyes, and the image of God, in which he was made, would be in danger of violation. God therefore ordained the law of the punishment of murder by death. God, moreover to assure men against the dread of the recurrence of so fearful a judgment, entered into a special covenant with Noah, as representative of the whole living world, that he would never repeat the judgment of the flood, and for a token of this, as a faithful witness in heaven to the latest generations, he appointed the rainbow. Thus was earth restored : and man, and beast, and bird, and herb resumed their courses in the visible economy of God. Where Noah settled upon quitting the ark, Scripture does not say ; all that can be deduced is that it was a country eastward of the plain of Shinar or Babylonia<sup>1</sup>. Some have thought that the ark rested nearly in the same place as where it had been buoyed up ; if so, awful and monitory indeed must have been the scenes displayed to Noah. He came upon a blank and dreary solitude, which had been formerly covered with the habitations and the works of men's industry, with palaces, and gardens, and fields. When he looked for famous cities, in which, like his

<sup>1</sup> Genesis xi. 2.

descendant Jonah in Nineveh, he had preached repentance, and the judgment of God, he found but mounts of slime, and sand, and gravel, which their ruins had gathered as the stream of the flood retired. The only feature by which he could recognise the country was the great river perhaps, as the Euphrates or Tigris, flowing through the loneliness with uninterrupted noise.

On settling, Noah betook himself to husbandry. The nomad life of the later patriarchs was, of course, out of the question. There were not as yet either flocks or herds. Nothing more is related of Noah, except what would at first sight appear a trivial and unimportant matter of course. He planted a vineyard. But from this vineyard proceeded a curse upon one third of mankind, which is taking its course at this very day. He was probably the inventor of wine, and through inexperience of its effects drank of it less cautiously than he otherwise would have done. He was found by his son Ham lying uncovered within his tent. Instead of turning with reverent modesty aside, and clothing his nakedness, the shameless unfeeling son went and called in his two brothers to come and gaze in derision as he himself had done. They on the contrary did that which he ought to have done. For this their behaviour the two brothers received a blessing which has run and is still seen running through their posterity ; and he received a curse, which is seen in the line of his children, marking them amid the main-flood of mankind, as a muddy tributary discovers its foul course through the clearness of the great stream. To this race, devoted from that hour, belong the

most awful catastrophes recorded in history. The destruction of the Canaanites, of the Carthaginians, and the Tyrians, are but the farther end of that chain of curses which in our day seems to terminate in the horrible sufferings of African slavery, and perhaps, alas ! the end is not yet—many links may remain for ages still unborn. This last recorded act of Noah, has been, of course, a familiar subject of scoff and ridicule with unbelievers, who thus bring upon themselves the curse of the first scoffer. But the man of sound religious feeling will take a very different view. He will make allowance for human infirmity by having through the jealous watchfulness of self-examination discovered his own. It is men who are ignorant of themselves, and therefore also reckless of the God who made them, that are ever ready with hard censure upon others. A clown can see the motions of the planets ; but the deep investigation of philosophy can alone discover to us the motion of the earth on which we stand. So easy is it to mark the errors of others, so difficult to find out our own. An unbelieving age is ever uncharitable, because it is self-ignorant. But let every Christian (in deed and not in name only) look up with reverence to this man of God, who was deemed worthy to be exempted from the general doom of mankind, and through whom, as through another Adam, we derive our Redeemer himself, with every blessing spiritual and temporal which we enjoy. Amid a flood of ungodliness he was just and perfect in his generation, and walked with God. Any failing in such a man, so far from prompting us to be censorious, should rather turn us back upon ourselves in a

wholesome alarm. A stronger castle than our own has been shaken. If so a holy man, who had so manfully stood up for God's honour and glory against the universal corruption of the world, was offended, may not we also? or rather have we not been? and not once, nor twice, nor thrice, but many times and often, by easy compliances (now perhaps forgotten and unrepented of) with the temper of our own times? Who are we that dare to judge a faithful servant of the Most High? Do we think it agreeable to our profession, accordant with our salvation, to take upon ourselves the accursed office of him who accuses his saints day and night before the throne of God? Let us rather take a salutary and reverential warning from this failing of our great forefather, such as dutiful and affectionate children from a holy father, whose very infirmities we mix amid the lessons which he hath given us, so veiling those with these, as his sons did his nakedness with a garment: not deliberately and scoffingly gazing at them in his person, as did Ham. Thus we overpower the accidental gall with the natural streams of the honey of truth and righteousness which have flowed forth to us from his lips. With this mind in us, we shall keep such a watch upon ourselves, that, if the day of the Lord shall suddenly come, we shall be found in the elect family of the ark of the Church, and not amid the reckless revellers who were overwhelmed amid the riot of their merriment and marriage feasting.

## ABRAHAM.

B. C. 1996—1821.

MEN soon forgot the warning of the flood. The eighth generation from the witnesses of this visitation sprang up in various quarters of the earth widely remote from each other, and from the resting place of the ark. It was busily employed in reclaiming devastated earth, and amid this employment forgot God. New settlers are but too notoriously reckless of the high concerns of their spiritual nature. Their attention is too generally swallowed up by the anxieties attending the struggle with the difficulties of an untamed soil. When, therefore, their religion has no more permanent vehicle than tradition, they, of course, bequeath but a part of the precious inheritance to their children, who again leave a still more scanty remnant to succeeding generations. Thus the word of God is quickly lost among them, except in so far as its ruins may dimly be discovered in the shape of vague and wild notions, and ill understood ceremonies, which in due time serve but as a foundation for the edifice of a debasing superstition. This is shortly reared by the conjoint operation of man's imagination, which increasing leisure gradually lets more freely loose to the influences of hope and fear, and of man's selfishness, which prompts him to seek dominion for himself by practising upon the weakness of his fellows. The first step of this declension

would be associating the worship of his ministers with that of the Most High God. And these ministers would be found by their gross notions in the elements and the heavenly host, to whose influences a rude people would feel themselves particularly subject. Man is accustomed to associate a spirit with voluntary motion, and seeing nothing to produce their motions, he would ascribe a living soul to the fire, to the wind, to the running water, and to each of the heavenly bodies, which night after night, and day after day, he beheld proceeding in their appointed courses. Feeling himself moreover subject to the effects of those motions, either immediately, as to that of the elements, or mediately, through the seasons which they appear to regulate, as to that of the heavenly bodies, he would be led to consider them as superior living powers, ministers of the Most High, whose favour it was his interest to win and maintain, and whose anger to propitiate and avert. But the master is ever forgotten for his servants by such as think themselves in any way dependant on the latter, and therefore was the worship of the Most High and only true God gradually forsaken for that of his inanimate creatures. Thus far had superstition advanced in the fore-mentioned generation, even among those who were remaining still and settled at the centre whence the waves of emigration had flowed far and wide to the more remote regions of the earth. Meanwhile, if the struggle with deteriorated earth produced forgetfulness of God, the victory over it still farther promoted it. The ruins of the world were now in a rapid state of repair, and the monuments of God's retributory wrath in a proportionally

gradual decay. Arts had arisen to relieve the necessities of man, and were now either advancing his luxury or administering to his power. Two great monarchies at least had been formed : the Assyrian empire which grew up at the resting-place of the ark, and the kingdom of Egypt which was erected by the distant emigrants of the West. What wonder if amid such incentives to the pride and the pleasure of man there was a general and grievous falling off from primitive purity, and growing licentiousness added to the debasing grossness of their idolatry. The leading nations in this apostasy were the descendants of the accursed Ham. But neither did the sons of the favoured Japhet escape the pollution, and it was found even in the line of the blessed Shem. In the extreme corner where the portion of his sons bordered on that of the sons of Ham, in Ur of the Chaldees, which lay between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, Terah, the eighth of his descendants, was worshipping other gods than the true<sup>1</sup>.

Amid this prevailing darkness it pleased God to interfere to rescue the light of his truth from utter extinction, and to provide for it a tabernacle wherein to dwell until the fulness of his appointed time for the restoration of all things should arrive. Terah had three sons, Abram, Nahor, and Haran. The first of these God now chose, as he had Noah before, as the favoured and single channel through which his Church should be transmitted to posterity, and the promise begun in Adam should be forwarded with augmented assurance of blessings, and in more

<sup>1</sup> Joshua xxiv. 2.

definite shape, to succeeding generations. Some divines have thought that Abram, like St. Paul, was for this occasion converted by God's especial call to a knowledge of the truth, and found their presumption (for it should not be more) upon the words of Joshua in his farewell charge to the chiefs of Israel, where he says, "Your fathers dwelt beyond the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abram, and the father of Nahor, and served other gods." Hence, however, we can by no means so clearly infer that Abram was an idolator, when he received his call, as to dispense with conflicting arguments from other quarters. We may oppose from Scripture to such a deduction, the fact of its being a singular instance of God so dealing with man. For St. Paul's case is not parallel. He was not called back from idolatry to the anciently established truth. He was not living in a transmitted apostasy, but was converted from the literal observance of a religion established by God himself, to the newly revealed spirit of that religion. Nor is the calling of the Heathen a case in point. They have not been called to the exclusion of the Jew, so far from it, that the Gospel, according to our Lord's especial commandment, was preached to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile. Nor is that case which seems much to have influenced the drawers of this deduction, and of which this is made the first and grand example, a case in point. I mean that of a godless man being called to repentance and amendment of life from amidst a crowd of sinners, who remain indifferent to the end. These last have the awakening word of God ever at hand, and no gift has been imparted of which they

are not in covenanted possession, nor has he been called but to a participation with others. But here, while there were still remaining here and there a few faithful servants of the most High God, Melchisedec for instance, a perfect stranger to him is summoned from the apostate rebellious ranks of falsehood and idolatry, and preferred to obedient sons as a transmitter of his truth. But above all it may be objected to this deduction, that the Church of God will then have undergone a total interruption, which never happened before, nor has since, and the revelation made to Abraham will be totally independent of the original promise made to Adam: it will not be a renewal and enlargement of a grant, but altogether a new grant. Such considerations determine the balance of the meaning of the passage against Abraham's being included in the charge of idolatry, at least when he received his call. Nor when we come to consider what might have been the extent of Terah's idolatry, will Abraham's abstinence from it at any time, appear so very singular. We see that his descendant Laban maintained idolatry in conjunction with the worship of Jehovah<sup>1</sup>. But so potent is a small mixture of truth with error, that with but a spark from without it will burst, in certain minds, into an overpowering blaze, such as effectually to dispel all the accompanying darkness of error. And thus has God often tried the minds of men, and according as they have stifled or cherished the internal conviction, they have been given over to a worse state of blindness than the first, or taken

<sup>2</sup> Compare Genesis xxiv. 31. 50. with xxxi. 19.

into a still larger share of light and truth. Now Abram might from his earliest years of understanding have heard the preaching of Shem, who (according to the Hebrew text) survived by many years the departure of Terah from Ur. And we cannot suppose that blessed patriarch to have seen with indifference the progress of idolatry amongst his descendants, nor to have not gone about unweariedly protesting against it with assertions of the truth, with tears of indignation, and with threatenings of God's wrath. At all events (if taking the text of the Septuagint, we will not allow Shem to be his contemporary) Abraham might have been instructed by some living forefather who had been instructed by Shem. Thus Abraham, had he been an idolator but within a little period of God's call, would be, when it came, in a state of pure faith, and complete possession of the oracles of God, as far as they had yet been given. He would be in the condition of our reformed Church, which, bringing the aid of Scripture, which was so long external to it, to bear upon the truth already sparkling amidst its corrupt liturgy, regained the whole precious deposit, and awaits in pure faith and hope the accomplishment of what still remains in promise.

In Ur of the Chaldees Abram received his first call from God to remove to a land which he would show him'. The consequences declare with what faith he received it, and with what zeal and alacrity

<sup>1</sup> That he received the first call in Ur, is evident, from comparing the expression, *to go into the land of Canaan*, in Genesis xi. 31. with xii. 1., and with xv. 7. Stephen in Acts vii. 2., directly mentions it.

he prepared the execution of his commands. He had at the very outset the difficult task of bringing over to his opinions an aged idolatrous father. To him so vital a change of religion, a thing sufficiently difficult to be accomplished at his time of life, was to be farther accompanied with a change of habitation to a strange and distant land, a condition little palatable to a man so far advanced in years, for he had now numbered upwards of 200. The father however of the faithful (as his posterity delight to call Abram) so effectually discharged his high commission, as to become the spiritual father of his natural father. When we have reflected upon the blindness of understanding, and hardness of heart which is produced by idolatry, when we have taken into account the natural aversion of old age from all change whatever, and its suspicious jealousy at any proposal of it from the young, especially from a son to a father, at a period too of society in which filial subjection was rigidly enforced both by law and religion, we may somewhat appreciate the exceeding difficulty of Abram's task, and the strength of his faith, and the depth of his love of God, his heavenly father. How often and how earnestly must he have prayed for help in such a cause, how determinedly must he have looked to God's approbation alone, with what simplicity, and singleness of mind, who could overcome the hindrance of so many qualities commendable before men. There were in his way, the filial affection which would decline from giving his father pain, and subjecting him to hardships which might be (and in this case were) fatal; there was the filial delicacy which would forbid the rebuke of his father's

conduct ; there was the filial dutifulness which would be so reluctant to dispute his father's wishes and opinions ; there was the filial charity which would be so apt to suppose in his father qualities which had to be imparted. A more severe trial can scarcely be proposed than to perform a duty towards God, which in its first few steps seems to lead away from that towards man. Then we are too often content to remain wilfully blind to all beyond those first few steps. The superficial contrariety is a sufficient argument whereby to silence the timid disputing conscience, or supplies matter for sophistical self-delusion. We even distrust God, as if having brought us thus far from the common route of duty he would then abandon us to the consequences, and the fear of man is allowed to overcome the love of God. This difficult victory of the world, was the first fruits of Abram's obedience. He did not quit father and brethren for the sake of the truth, but he did more, he brought them to the truth with him. He prevailed not only over his father Terah, but also over his brother Nahor<sup>1</sup>, and his nephew Lot. Some time of course was consumed in this conversion of his kindred, and in persuading them to give such a proof of their sincerity as the abandonment of their country, their kinsmen, and their friends. But now they were taught to seek a better country, and a city which God had prepared for them<sup>2</sup>. Rugged indeed was their immediate prospect. They had "to transport themselves over the great river Euphrates,

<sup>1</sup> That he accompanied him as far as Haran appears from  
 ✓ Genesis xxix. 4, 5.

Heb. xi. 16.

✓ to travel through the dangerous and barren deserts of Palmyrena, and to climb over the great and high mountains of Libanus, Hermon or Gilead<sup>1</sup>." But they carried with them the Church of God, nor did the cloudy pillar over the tabernacle more surely direct the march of their wandering descendants, than his direction guided them now. Their caravan safely crossed the tract intervening between Ur and Haran, and then paused, in order, as it would appear, to give repose to the aged body of Terah, which already felt the effects of the journey. It proved in the end fatal to him. Here at the advanced age of 205, the old man breathed his last. We may reasonably suppose that it was his intention to proceed, could he have resumed strength sufficient. From the expression of Scripture this halt appears to have been of considerable duration. Perhaps Terah here fell into that helpless bed-ridden state, which puts an end to life as to any positive use or enjoyment of it, and yet keeps it lingering on from month to month, or even from year to year. Abram had the consolation that his father had reached that country of which the promised land, which he had fallen short of seeing, was but the shadowy type. He had given full proof of his faith, he had sealed it with his death.

✓ After this event Abram received a second and much more distinct call from God. He was bidden to proceed forthwith to the land of promise, where both a temporal and spiritual blessing should await him. He was there to be the founder of a great nation ; but, above all,

<sup>1</sup> Raleigh's History of the World, p. 183.

in his seed all families of the earth were to be blessed. Thus he bore in his loins the Redeemer, which had been promised to Adam. He was exalted to rank with him and with Noah, as a sole fountain of the blessing to man. The Redeemer, who before might have seemed indistinct and distant, was now brought home to him, clear and defined. What should he reckon of the toils and perils of the way before him, who carried within himself the Saviour of the world? Surely all burdens were light, and all tasks were easy. Full of this lively faith he set out with Sarai, once more on his long journey<sup>1</sup>. Nachor remained at Haran, but Lot still accompanied his uncle. The longest and the most dangerous part of their whole journey now awaited them. But they crossed in safety the "great flood," securely passed the desert which succeeded it, ascended and descended the lofty ridge of Hermon, passed beneath the cedar-topped ranges of Libanus, might have drunk of the sources of the Jordan, and turning to their left, entered the beautiful and fruitful plains of Galilee, so honoured afterwards with the earthly sojourn, and the preaching, and the miracles of the Redeemer whom he bore in his loins. Advancing now southward,

<sup>1</sup> I have here followed the obvious sense of Genesis xi. 32, which is confirmed by St. Stephen in Acts vii. 4.; according to this Abram was born when Terah was aged 130 (compare Genesis xi. 32; xii. 4.) and therefore was not his eldest son. (See Genesis xi. 26.) So neither were Isaac, nor Jacob, nor Judah, nor David, nor Solomon. The age of Terah at Abram's birth need not surprise us. Abram had sons by Keturah at 137. He is named first in Genesis xi. 26, no doubt from his spiritual rank and celebrity, especially as being the forefather of Israel. So likewise Shem in Genesis xi. 10.

he took as his guide the mountainous ridge which running southward from Carmel, connects Libanus with the lofty mountainous ranges of Judea. This forms as it were a back-bone of the country, dividing the plain of the Jordan from the sea-coast between Carmel and Joppa. Its several peaks, therefore, might afford commanding views of a great portion, and that the richest, of the promised land. By the time he had come to the part of this ridge, which afterwards went under the name of Mount Ephraim, and had reached the turpentine tree of Moreh, near the site of Sichem, he had passed through the line of the fairest portion of the country, and perhaps it was when he was looking round from one of the summits in this neighbourhood, and saw the vale of the Jordan with its eastern wall of mountains in the distance on one hand, and the sea glittering and mingling with the western sky, and bounding a wide extent of intervening country on the other, and when he had blessed the Giver of such bounties, and seeing in them the earnest of the crowning spiritual blessing, had addressed himself to fervent and thankful prayer, it was in such a moment perhaps that the Lord appeared unto him, and said, ✓ "Unto thy seed will I give this land<sup>1</sup>." Thus was he welcomed, and as it were inducted into the land by the Lord himself. Yet the express words of this present promise clearly implied to him, that he himself was not to have his portion in the land. It said not "to thee and thy seed." He then was to be but a sojourner in it. Yet even in this sense,

<sup>1</sup> Genesis xii. 7.

and carnally speaking, he might feel it to be his own, and might have enjoyed that satisfaction which the founders of families experience, which look forward to a posterity enjoying the rank and riches which they had procured for them through a life of toil ; but never had time or opportunity to enjoy for themselves. But such a feeling must have been quite absorbed by the joy and magnificence of the spiritual prospect. He was to be the father of a nation of believers in the only true God ; and he already saw in spirit all that land, which, as he passed through, showed the abominable sight of idolatrous rites and manners (for the Canaanite was then and already in the land<sup>1</sup>) filled from one end to the other with the steam of incense burnt to Jehovah, and heard it echo through all its borders with hymns sung to the Lord God of hosts, from thousands of worshippers sprung from his own loins. Thus was he to be not only a natural, but also a spiritual father, and the Church of God, hitherto so straitened, was destined here to burst through its narrow channel, and spread its waters of life far and wide over the land. We may presume that it was during the rest of the Sabbath that he was blest with this glorious vision ; for on this spot, thus sanctified, he built an altar and called on the name of the Lord<sup>2</sup>. This was afterwards his custom, ever as he halted, and thus he offered in the land the first fruits of that worship which his posterity, having purged the land of idolatry, should establish to the living God.

Hence he prosecuted his journey southward,

<sup>1</sup> Genesis xii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. xii. 8.

still directed by the same mountains. The next recorded Sabbath-day's rest was spent near Bethel, where his grandson Jacob had his heavenly vision of angels. How would his righteous soul have been vexed could he have foreseen the pollution of the neighbourhood, which he was now consecrating for the first time to the living God, by building an altar and calling on the name of the Lord. For there an idolatrous descendant set up one of his golden calves for the worship of schismatic Israel. There was no further place of note by which the sacred historian could mark his Sabbatical halts. But he was still pressing on towards the south, when  
✓ his course was arrested by a famine in the land. It was as yet but thinly peopled<sup>1</sup>, and continued from that cause liable to such visitations even in the time of his grandson, whom he now preceded by a visit to Egypt, the abundance of whose fertility was always a ready resource to the poverty of her rocky and ill-peopled neighbours. The Pharaohs were swaying its sceptre, and the present monarch had a foretaste of the plagues which chastised his successor. Smitten with her beauty, he detained Sarai and took her into his house. He was partly excused by a device of Abram, who made her pass for his sister and not his wife, being afraid that they might kill him in order to enjoy his widow. The heavy infliction however of God's wrath prompted the king to make inquiries. On finding out the real fact he restored her to Abram; and after rebuking him for disingenuously misleading him, dismissed him in safety,

<sup>1</sup> See Genesis xiii. 9.

and with his wife and all that he had from the country. The worst which can be imputed to Abram in this business is that he yielded to a very natural infirmity, such as the best of men are subject to. But when we consider his very unprotected state among an unprincipled people, and reflect how little we can enter at this day into the real state of the case, through our ignorance of the manners, customs, and circumstances of those times, our charity, if not our reverence for the Patriarch, will prompt us to decline passing a sentence on the transaction. From Egypt he proceeded northward until he came once again to his old place of sojourn near Bethel, where he had built an altar, and again celebrated the Sabbath by sacrificing and calling on the name of the Lord. It was in this neighbourhood, and shortly after this time, that the separation took place between him and Lot. They had left Egypt rich in cattle, owing to the bounty of Pharaoh, and so numerous were now their flocks and herds, that pasture was wanting. This bred continual quarrels among their herdsmen, which might endanger their safety, and at the least, give scandal, in a country where they were strangers, and jealously watched by the native Canaanite and Perizzite. Abram therefore, proposed that they should part company, and gave Lot the choice of the country. From the high ground, where they were, they commanded (as we have seen before) an extensive view both to the east and west. Lot was struck with the richness of the vale of the Jordan. It reminded him of the fertile plain of the Nile, which he had so lately exchanged for the scanty brooks and narrow valleys of the

mountainous district in which they now were. He accordingly made his election and chose him all the plain of the Jordan, and proceeded eastward to take possession. Abram remained where he was. He now stood under peculiar circumstances with regard to the promise made to him. The vast increase which had been made to his substance was gaining for him consideration and even power in the country, as was shortly proved, and was thus an earnest of the great inheritance which had been assured to him. On the other hand nations were growing up into strength as occupants of the land, when he looked within; and he saw the Assyrian empire daily enlarging its power and its bounds, so as to be likely to curb the fortunes of his posterity as a nation, when he looked without. Sarai too was still barren; and Lot, whom probably (Josephus affirms it<sup>1</sup>) he had adopted as his son, had now quitted him. It is this last circumstance which gives its peculiar point to the vision with which he was favoured at this spot. In all the previous Lot might have been included, and Abram might have interpreted them of his posterity by adoption. But he was now alone, and childless.

- ✓ His faith therefore was going to be put to a more severe trial than it had yet experienced. He was standing on one of the lofty eminences before mentioned, when the word of the Lord came unto him, and said, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

<sup>1</sup> A. J. I. 7. 1.

And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it, and in the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee<sup>1</sup>."

As concerns the land, this promise goes far beyond all previous, both in distinctness and amplitude. His own name is now put into the deed of gift, and to certify it to him, he is bidden, as a son by his father, to traverse and inspect the estate of which he is assured the possession. With express reference to his childless state, an innumerable posterity is promised, which may well dispel any fear of the Canaanite or Assyrian. But here again the promise which he received in Haran would lead him to understand not only a natural, but a spiritual posterity also, even all the nations of the earth which were to be blessed in his seed. So that it is impossible to enter but a few steps deep into the contemplation of the prospect here presented to Abram, without being bewildered and overwhelmed with its exceeding magnificence. He saw his posterity filling the land before him, and God dwelling amid their innumerable host in all truth and holiness. From amongst them he saw arise the Redeemer of himself and of mankind. And, still beyond, he saw all the tribes of earth gathered under him, and in him worshipping the only true God. What a glorious blaze did this futurity cast upon the darkness of the idolatry immediately surrounding him. The beholder of the revelation of Christ scarcely saw a brighter vision

<sup>1</sup> Genesis xiii. 14, &c.

from his gloomy prison house of Patmos, when he gazed on a vast crowd, which no one could number, from every nation, and tribes, and people, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clad in white garments, and palm branches in their hands, and shouting with a loud voice, saying, "Hosanna to our God that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb<sup>1</sup>." It would be well if Christian fathers would look upon their posterity in a similar spiritual view, and sanctify the proud hopes of the natural father by the heavenly satisfaction of the spiritual father. They are entitled to do so, they are enjoined to do so. They are fathers of promise, the Gospel has assured them generally a spiritual posterity, and it becomes them to lay hold of this assurance and make it particular. If they discharge this duty by all attention to the spiritual education of their children, then, morally speaking, they may impart a lively principle which may go on, wave after wave, through many generations. And, spiritually speaking, the grace of God is upon their work to make it complete and lasting. They may bequeath to the Church of God a household of spiritual priests, to maintain his altars from generation to generation. If they must needs found families, then let them place all the joy of their hope and pride in their being distinguished and lasting portions of the congregation of the Church, and consider the settlement which they have acquired for them in the land, the rank which they have obtained for them, the influence which they have erected for them,

<sup>1</sup> Rev. vii. 9.

to be the means of promoting the cause of pure and undefiled religion, and upholding the honour and glory of their Master upon earth. Then they will prove that they do indeed consider themselves but as strangers and sojourners, and that they are looking out for a better country.

In obedience to this command Abraham strikes his tents and begins his wandering march once again. He had not hitherto surveyed the southern part, except so much as lay towards the sea coast on his way into Egypt. He now therefore proceeds along the same line of mountains, leaves to his left Salem, the capital of Melchisedec, and finally settles in the neighbourhood of Hebron, a town which was destined to be hereafter the capital of the tribe of Judah. The place of his sojourn was the turpentine tree of Mamre, a celebrated spot in after times, and, since here also was spent the most remarkable period of Abram's life, it seems to demand a more particular account. The turpentine tree (called oak tree in our version) is frequently mentioned in Scripture, as designating a place. Thus we have already mentioned the turpentine tree of Moreh. As it threw a convenient shade in that hot and bare land, and grew naturally in the neighbourhood of a well, the spot of its growth was one of frequent resort, crowded every day by the passengers of some halting caravan, and therefore marked a well-known station, just as the palm trees do in the deserts at this day. As it was also a tree which grew to a very great age like our oak, these stations continued from age to age<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> So some of our places in England derive their names from oaks, some of them still existing, which seem to have sheltered

Among these spots the turpentine tree of Mamre was pre-eminent. Its peculiar convenience of situation was one cause of this ; but the peculiar character of sanctity imparted to it by the residence of Abram, and especially by the appearance of three angels to him there, was the principal. It was sacred to the Heathen from corrupt tradition, to the Jew from historical knowledge, and was annually the scene of a great meeting, where both Greek and Jew were assembled, and worshipped with their various rites. In Sozomen's days it was still called Terebinthus, and a splendid Christian temple erected by Helena extinguished there both the Jewish and Heathen superstitions. The feast naturally brought with it an immense market, frequented by Phœnicians, Arabians, and the bordering nations, and could Abram have seen into the future, painful indeed, and yet joyful would have been the thoughts of many hours past there ; for on this, very spot, as in the great mart of those parts, Adrian proclaimed a market for the sale of the remnant of his miserable captive posterity. Then as a natural father he was robbed of the better part of his children ; but as a spiritual father he had his family daily increasing, and visibly mounting up to the fulness of that blessing, when it should be countless as the stars in heaven, and as the sand on the sea-shore. Here, according to custom, Abram erected an altar for worship during his sojourn.

We now begin to see a manifest approach of the

congregations at the first preaching of Christianity to the Saxons. We have Christ's Oak, Gospel Oak, Postles' Oak, Lady Oak.

accomplishment of God's promises. Abram's life is no longer that of a private individual, but its narrative brings us into the company of kings and princes, and is mingled with the events of empires. He had not long settled here before the Assyrian empire put forth its might to chastise its rebellious tributaries. The five kings of the vale of Siddim (which is now occupied by the Dead Sea), in the thirteenth year of their subjection, raised the standard of revolt. The Assyrian army under four princes invaded the country, and having defeated all opposition made by other Canaanitish tribes, from the Rephaim and Ammonite, in the north, to the Amalekites and Horite, in the south, they at last were met by the allied forces of the five kings in their vale, who perhaps designedly chose that spot for their field of battle on account of the numerous slime-pits in it, which might entrap the Assyrian horse. The device, however, seems to have been the cause of their own ruin. They were utterly defeated, and two out of the five kings slain. The rest fled to the mountains. The Assyrians took and plundered the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and led their inhabitants captive. Among these was Lot, who was then residing in Sodom. News of this being brought to Abram, he immediately determined to rescue his nephew. He armed his servants and retainers, amounting in number to 318, and to these was added the aid of three brothers, his confederates, Mamre, Eshchol, and Aner, who were Amorites. Weak and insignificant as this small band appeared compared with so mighty an undertaking, yet it had in its chieftain Abram a leader whose courage wholly

reposing in God was equal to any enterprise, and whose wisdom, inspired by God, could insure success, under his guidance, against any odds, however fearful. He diligently followed their track up the fruitful vale of the Jordan, to the very source of the river in the neighbourhood of Dan. Here, as they were asleep and stupified also, most probably, by the riot and drunkenness consequent upon the gaining of such immense spoil in a march through so fruitful a district, he fell upon them by night, and utterly discomfited them, slaying and pursuing even to Hobah, which is near Damascus. He recovered from them all their booty, and delivered his nephew. This victory spoke loudly to Abram. To his own arm, supported but by a small force of friends and servants, God had given such might as to deliver the land from a formidable foreign army. What then may not his posterity accomplish under the same favour? What could either they who were within, or they who were without, prevail against them, when he himself had delivered the one party by the defeat of the other? Here was an earnest indeed of the accomplishment of God's promises to him. He who had wrought this for him could also give him a posterity in despite of Sarai's barrenness. But a still greater person than Lot owed his deliverance to Abram's arm. Melchisedec, King of Salem, and priest of the Most High God, but, above all, the type presented to his posterity of the Christ to come, this mysterious personage, upon whom both Jew and Christian look back with reverence, who stands on the roll of the Church of God in letters large and bright, as a master-mover in it, marched out from

his city of Salem (which being interpreted means "peace," and stood on the site of the future Jerusalem) to meet Abram on his return from the north towards Mamre, and refreshed him and his followers with provision of bread and wine. The behaviour on this occasion of the Father of the Faithful presents a striking example to his spiritual children, of humility and subordination to God's appointed ministers. Although honoured with the direct and extraordinary communion of God, assured with promises such as had not been given to man since the days of Adam, bearing the Redeemer of the world in his loins, at this moment glorious in a signal victory in which God had manifestly fought with him, and thus acknowledged him as a highly favoured servant, yet he did not exalt himself above the regular and ordinary priest of God, on the contrary he humbled himself, and confessed his inferiority by paying to him the tithe of his spoil, and accepting his blessing. He paid reverence where reverence was due, tribute where tribute, and thus showed the mark of true unfeigned godliness. God can never brook to have his own ordinances slighted by any one, whoever he be. He is not divided against himself; and therefore his faithful servant, however highly endowed with spiritual gifts, even beyond the lot of appointed ministers of his word, will yet reverently regard both them and all the institutions of the Church. It is by the false servant, and the spiritual pride resulting from delusion, that God's ordinary institutions are despised as mean and beggarly elements, and seem dull common-place compared with his own bright and extraordinary instrumen-

talities. He bears the certain mark of a feigned or at least imaginary commission, who rails at dignities and despises authorities, and by his very assumption proves the utter falsehood of his pretensions. There is a peculiar solemnity in the form of the blessing conferred by this type of the Christ upon his fleshly forefather. "Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the Most High God which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand." How must Abram's soul have been glad when, after his long conversation with idolators, he met with this true servant of God, this his acknowledged minister; how, in the blessing of this saint of the Lord, must he have felt the seal of God set upon his doings, and been comforted. It was the first time that he had lifted up his hand in battle, and the sanction of so holy a minister of God as this Prince of Salem (which, being interpreted, is Prince of Peace), could not but be most welcome, nor could he but think himself highly favoured if he had been the means of delivering him from imminent peril of oppression at the hand of the stranger, if not from oppression itself. We can scarcely enter sufficiently into his feelings, for in our days blessings are but lightly thought of, although conferred in the glorious and holy name of him of whom Melchisedec was the shadow. The generally prevailing distrust, through general laxity, of holiness sufficient for the power of bestowing such a spiritual benefit, has reduced them to the rank of merely formal prayers, and caused them scarcely to be asked or given. It was not so in better times. Our forefathers knew and had the comfort of the

blessing of some faithful servant of God upon their works and their ways.

The very success of Abram in this expedition was likely to be mischievous to him in its consequences. He was a stranger, and it may raise against him the ill will of the jealousy of the natives of the land. The Assyrian too, would most probably return with an overwhelming force to avenge the affront, and then the native princes may be glad to purchase pardon by submission, and make their peace by giving up the author of the former calamitous disgrace. In any case he now stood on a dangerous eminence. Such probably was the subject of his fears, when the word of the Lord came to him in a vision and said, "Fear not, Abram : I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Abram had been musing upon his solitary unprotected state, and feeling most sensibly the want of children to support him, especially of any thing like an earnest of that posterity which had been promised, when a few sons, each at the head of a band like his own, would give him security, replied despondingly, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless ;" and complained that after all, he should have to leave all his property, according to the custom of the times, to his favourite and confidential slave, Eliezer the Damascene, his house-steward. "This shall not be thine heir, but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir," was the answer of the Lord. To give force to this assurance the Lord led him forth and said, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars if thou be able to number them:" Abram looked up, and the Lord added, "So shall

thy seed be." Abram believed in the Lord, and it was counted to him for righteousness. This is, excepting the offering of Isaac, the most important passage of Abram's life, not only as regarding himself, but the whole Church after him throughout all ages. It appears in the text of the book of the Mosaic law to warn his natural posterity against any reliance on the inherent virtue of its rites and ceremonies, and works according to its letter, and the apostle of the Gentiles has expressly pointed it out to his spiritual posterity, that they may not put any trust in outward works, but in the spirit which gives birth to those works, and this spirit is faith in that Redeemer, who was promised to Abram, and has been given to them. Abram on receiving the above promise from God, although despondent before, immediately flang away to the winds all doubts, stayed not for a moment to reckon of his own aged body<sup>1</sup>, now nearly 100 years old, nor of Sarai's womb, now shut up long after the natural season of bearing. God had promised, and that was sufficient against all human hope. And in answer to such energy of faith, God accepted him as just before him. He blotted out from the handwriting against him all former thoughts, words, and deeds, all his former misgivings, and doubts, and these being put away, took him as his faith in that moment made him, counted him righteous upon it. Thus became he Father of the Faithful, not of the circumcision only, but of the uncircumcision too, to which class he himself at this moment belonged.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. iv. 19.

Thus is he the great model to all who seek justification, and his faith the model of their faith. Theirs must abide the trial, and come forth like his, a hope in God against all human hope, a hope in him who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, which therefore set on the world to come can resist, even unto blood<sup>1</sup>, any opposition from the world around. Thus became he the father of many nations : not only of the Jew, the Arab, the Idumean, his fleshly offspring, but of the Greek, of the Roman, of the Syrian, of the Latin, and of all people from north and south, and east and west, to the end of the world, who, entertaining his faith, have become his spiritual offspring. Thus became he inheritor, not of the land of Canaan only, but of the whole world<sup>2</sup>. We must henceforward look upon him in a still higher light, and carefully mark the trace of his steps, for they are all set on the holy ground of the Church of God. Of this he is now the second founder under God, and in this passage of his life has been proclaimed its spiritual and universal dominion. It here spreads in bright effulgence over the whole world, before being temporarily narrowed into time and place by the constraint of carnal ordinances. And it is our happy lot to live when, having threaded this channel, it has burst forth again into full liberty, and with a blaze of tenfold brightness.

God now proceeds to deal still more graciously with his servant. Having renewed his promise to Abram, which he reminds him that he had originally made to him in Ur of the Chaldees, his promise of

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. iv. 13.

the inheritance of this land, he farther gives him, at his request, a pledge and token of it. This is given after the form of ancient custom, according to which a beast was divided, the two parts laid against each other, and the parties pledging the fulfilment of the engagement passed between<sup>1</sup>. According to God's command Abram takes an heifer three years old, a she-goat of three years old, a ram of three years old, and a turtle dove and young pigeon. The beasts he divided in the middle, and laid the parts opposite to each other. The birds, however, were not divided. All being ready, as the sun went down, a great horror of darkness fell upon Abram : for he expected, of course, from this preparation, some awful manifestation of the divine presence, and solitude and darkness brought an accession to his fears. A deep sleep fell upon him, and then the word of the Lord came unto him. The communication was suited to put his faith to a yet farther trial, to dash any hopes, if such he had, of the wealth and power and rank, which he had now acquired, serving as any foundation for the greatness of his posterity, and to abate any impatience of an heir conceived on such grounds. That posterity was to be for some time like himself, a stranger in the land, and even worse than himself, ill-treated and subjected for 400 years. After that period, they were to come out from their place of servitude and oppression with great substance, and in the fourth generation to return to this land and take vengeance upon the iniquities of its people ; the first part of which was literally fulfilled

<sup>1</sup> See the Commentators on Genesis xv. 9. Jeremiah xxxiv. 18.

by the events which intervened between the birth of Isaac, and the delivery of the Law by Moses, and the last under Joshua. He himself, he was told, should not live to see the oppression foretold, but should go to his fathers in peace, and be buried in a good old age. When the sun had gone down, and it was now dark, the glory of the Lord, appearing like a smoking furnace and burning lamp, passed between the pieces, and thus confirmed the covenant. It was that same glory which like a pillar of fire afterwards conducted his posterity to the land, and fulfilled all the terms of the covenant. The land promised to Abram was now marked out to him by the Lord, who enumerating the nations in present possession, gave him the whole from the Nile to the Euphrates.

God put his faithful servant to a long trial. Event after event more clearly evinces that if he had a posterity it would be likely to prosper in the land. All the accessories are ready, but the main thing is withheld. He is still childless. In those times when every chief, such as Abram now was, became the founder of a tribe, and, perhaps, eventually of a nation, when, from prevailing anarchy, it was a parent's interest no less than pride, to raise around himself a wall of children, and they were indeed arrows in the hand of a giant, the state of childlessness must have been no ordinary calamity. It increased rapidly with increasing years, and utter helplessness soon changed the mockery of neighbours into aggression. Confident in God's promises Abram bore up against it with patience. But Sarai could not brook it so easily. Her barrenness was a constant reproach to her. Perhaps, the splen-

dour of the promised posterity made her impatient to procure the accomplishment by any means. Impelled therefore as Rachel was in similar circumstances afterwards, she persuaded Abram to raise children by her bondwoman Hagar the Egyptian. These, according to the custom of the time and country, would pass for her own. In an evil hour Abram was prevailed upon, not that he believed that thus he should obtain the posterity of promise. For although Sarai had not hitherto been expressly mentioned in the several communications from God, yet she only was his lawful wife, and must have been implied as the mother all along. That Abram understood thus, appears from his complaining<sup>1</sup> of being childless, when it is clear from his yielding to Sarai's solicitations now, that the fault lay not with himself. Thus were renewed the evils which had arisen from the sons of Seth taking to themselves the daughters of Cain. The offspring was an enemy to God's Church. Abram begot in Ishmael the unrelenting adversaries to the true faith. His posterity have ever persecuted their brethren of promise. They have been a continual plague and thorn in the side of the followers of the Redeemer, they have been the most cruel oppressors of the children of Jacob. Too truly have they verified the prophecy of the angel to Agar, that "Ishmael should be a wild man: his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him." Son of the bondwoman, and eldest-born to his father, he typified the law<sup>2</sup>—which was born before the Gospel—the law from Sinai opposed to the Holy

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xv. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Galat. iv. 22, &c.

Ghost from Sion. He is the typical representative of all such as have clung to the letter of God's word, and foregone its spirit. Alas how little do the wisest and the best of men consider the fruits of their actions. Abram should have seen that he at least incurred the risk of producing lets and hindrances in the way of the promised seed, when his first-born was to be the son of a bondwoman. God's promise, indeed, would make its way against any hindrance; but woe to him by whom that hindrance came. God's displeasure seems signified in some expressions in the next communication made to him. He bids him "walk before him, and be perfect," words which seem to imply some previous obliquity.

This communication had become necessary from the birth of Ishmael, in order utterly to extinguish in all concerned every notion of that being in any way related to the promise. It was made when the boy had reached the age of thirteen, a period at which the Jews reckoned the understanding sufficiently advanced for the appreciation of Divine truth. Abram was ninety-nine years old, and Sarai was ninety. God's especial interference alone could now make her a mother, and her child would indeed be a child of promise. Abram's long-enduring faith was at length fully rewarded. Not only were the former heads of the promise repeated, and in more distinct terms, and in richer amplitude of meaning, not only were nations and kings to come out of him, and the land promised for an everlasting possession to his seed, and his protection assured as their peculiar God, not only was Sarai now especially mentioned as the blessed mother for the first time, but the birth

was fixed for the next year, and to confirm the covenant two tokens were established, one was temporary, and was the change of his name into Abraham, or father of a multitude, to signify that God had made him the father of many nations, and that of Sarai into Sarah, or princess, by which was implied the promise that she should be a mother of nations, and kings of people should be of her. The other was perpetual, to his seed for ever, and this was the rite of circumcision, which was to take place on the eighth day in the case of every male born in the house, whether of his seed or not. In consequence of this Ishmael was circumcised, and has transmitted the rite to all his descendants. Such was the glorious view now opened to Abraham. Never has man, in all his most ambitious hopes, had a vision so bright, so filling the imagination. Men have since his days given birth to nations, and founded empires. But they have toiled always in dim uncertainty, almost always in utter ignorance of the magnificent consequences. They have lived unconscious of the reverence, and perhaps deification and worship bestowed upon them by a powerful posterity. But Abraham's prospect, if it was clear, was spiritual also. He looked over this carnal interval of greatness, and regarded it as a mere introduction to the spiritual reality beyond, and the promised nation, and kings, and princes, as mere harbingers of the coming of the kingdom, and of the King of heaven.

But amidst all this splendour of prospect, far less than which has steeled the heart of man against his nearest and dearest, if they seemed

for a moment to stand in the way, Abraham forgot not his child Ishmael. His heart was moved for him, appearing, as he did, quite put aside and forgotten, and shut out to make way for the child of promise. He therefore said to God, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" God graciously heard his servant's prayer, and told him, that although he should establish his covenant with the child to be born, whom he commanded now to be called Isaac, and to him therefore alone tended all that he had promised so long and so often, yet he would remember Ishmael also : that he had blessed him, and would multiply him exceedingly, so that twelve princes should come out of him, and that he should be a great nation. How completely God has fulfilled this promise, who does not know ; even at this day, his natural and adopted posterity are in possession of the fairest portion of the earth, which they have gained by the sword. On the southern coast of the Mediterranean, and over the western and southern portions of Asia he reigns without a rival, a conspicuous, and not long since dreaded, object, in the presence of the spiritual descendants of his brother.

His tents were still pitched at Mamre, and here God gave him a signal instance of his merciful condescension, and exhibited at the same time a terrible example of his vengeance upon the disobedient, as well as a foretaste of the manner in which he could clear the land before the chosen seed. He was sitting in the heat of the day at his tent-door, when three men appeared before him, whom he immediately humbly entreated to partake of his hospitality. By them, or rather by one of them, both he and Sarah were assured

of the child of promise. On their rising to depart, the same person, whom Abraham now discovered from his words to be the Lord (He was the Son of God, who on occasions of the ministration of the old covenant appeared to men in human shape, as he did, after this, to Joshua), informed Abraham that he was on his way to judge Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham, full of the kindness and charity which became the father of the faithful, interceded for them with deep humility and earnestness, and a scene ensued of intercession which it would be presumptuous to abridge, or to give in any other words than those of holy writ. But their horrible sins went beyond all power of human intercession, and Abraham when he rose early next morning, and had gone to the place where the Lord had pointed out the cities to him, and the judgment he was bringing upon them, looked towards them, and toward all the land of the plain, and lo! the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace. This was the last time that the birth of the promised child was announced. In a short time it took place.

To a careless reader of Scripture it may seem that Abraham's faith must have been but weak and unsteady, which could require such repeated assurances. But we have seen that these were all made on suitable occasions, on such as called for such renewal, as after the departure of Lot, and after the birth of Ishmael, and as when, in fear of the vengeance of the Assyrian, he needed comfort amid danger and perplexity. So graciously does God deal with his servants. Ever as they need counsel or comfort he gives them both through his Holy Spirit, and turns their attention perpetually on

the cardinal point of all action, on the sole refuge from all suffering, the promise of everlasting life in Jesus Christ. Thus he renews his assurances with us as he did with Abraham, and we go on from faith to faith, and from fulfilment to fulfilment. He that hath shall receive more. A renewal therefore of God's promise is given, but to such as have already received it with faith. To such as have not, it never comes again ; it is removed altogether, since from him that hath not is taken away, even what he hath. He must indeed be but an imperfect Christian, who wonders at the frequency of the promises made to Abraham. ✓

Abraham now quitted his residence at the turpentine tree of Mamre, which perhaps the late judgment on the cities had rendered uncomfortable, and advanced still farther to the south, until he came to Gerar, on the very verge of the land of Canaan. Here he was obliged for fear of his life to resort to the same artifice that he had employed in Egypt. Sarah passed for his sister. Abimelech, the king of the country, took her to himself, as Pharaoh had done, and was obliged, as he, by inflictions from God, to release her. He dismissed them with presents, and Abraham set up his tents at the well of Beersheba, a place which afterwards passed into a proverb, as being the very southernmost point of the land of Israel. Here Sarah was delivered of her supernatural burden, of her child of promise, to which she gave the name of Isaac, or, " he laughs," according to the commandment of God, when Abraham laughed, and said in his heart, " shall a child be born to him that is a hundred years old ? and shall Sarah, that is

ninety years old, bear<sup>1</sup>?" The son of Hagar soon felt the effects of the change produced by this event. He was found by Sarah laughing and mocking; her indignation was roused, and she insisted upon Abraham's casting out both the bondwoman and her son, "for the son of this bondwoman," she said, "shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." Sarah betrayed somewhat a step-mother's jealousy, perhaps, but she had good reason for demanding this separation. Looking to the high calling of Isaac, as the child of heavenly promise, as destined to transmit God's oracles, as a sacred fountain head, whence the Redeemer of the world was to draw his lineage, she judged right in thinking the son of the Egyptian bondwoman no fit companion for him, still less entitled to share Abraham's inheritance with him. There was nothing in common between the boys. One was the child of the mistress, the other of the maid. One was the offspring of heavenly promise, the other of fleshly desire. One was to be at enmity with all mankind in his descendants, the other to bring universal peace and good-will upon earth in his posterity. And so it has been in their children to this day. The one has ever since maintained the revealed will of God. The other the corrupt inventions and traditions of man. Into the lineage of the one have been adopted all the enlightened nations of the world, civilization has exclusively followed its train. The line of the other (with the exception of the short-

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xvii. 17. 19.

lived light which burst forth under the caliphs) has ever been plunged into the grossest darkness of the most besotted ignorance. From the one came Christ, v from the other came Mahomet. How should two such progenitors be equals and companions in one house? God therefore sanctioned Sarah's demand. "In all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice (said he) for in Isaac shall thy seed be called." Grievous as it was to Abraham, for we have seen before how dearly he loved his son, he instantly submitted to God's order, who at the same time comforted him with a renewal of the promise that he would make of the son of the bondwoman a great nation. So the bondwoman and her son were sent away.

Of what befell during the boyhood of Isaac, we have no further account. Many years had elapsed since his birth (Josephus says five and twenty <sup>1</sup>), when God demanded from Abraham by far the severest trial to which he had put him. This child of God's especial promise, born to him after all human hope had become extinct, after so much anxiety and trial; this, his son, his only son, Isaac, whom he so loved, he was commanded by God to take with him unto the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which God would tell him of. The amazement and perplexity of Abraham must have been extreme, his grief beyond all bounds. Would God undo his own work? Was his own long and painful trial of patience to have this reward? Did he for this leave the land of his fathers, that he might bury his only

<sup>1</sup> A. J. i. 13. 2.

son, the son of his old age, and go down in sorrow and solitude to the grave? and not only bury him, but actually put him to death? Better thoughts, however, would soon arise, as soon as the first burst was over. He would then remember that God had especially told him that in Isaac should his seed be called. God cannot lie. Yea, let every man be a liar and God true concerning his promise. He must have some hidden way of keeping his promise towards me. What if he raise him again from the dead, and thus at once try me, and give me an example also of the resurrection which the Redeemer shall work for me in the latter days<sup>1</sup>. It must be this that he will do with the boy. However it be, it is his command and especial will; and his will be done. I am in his hands: he is with me, and where he is there must be fulness of joy. Thus resolved upon obedience to God, he rose early in the morning, and took his son with him, and furnished with wood for a sacrifice, a circumstance which strongly shows the bare and dreary character of the country which he had to traverse. The mountains of Moriah would be at the distance of a journey of between thirty and forty miles. They reached them on the third day. However assured by his faith of a happy result, Abraham must have made this journey in exceeding depression and anguish. Against all that he had in hope, there was the fact that he had to imbrue his hands in the blood of his son, who was now accompanying him, utterly unconscious that he himself was to be the victim. He was the sole bearer

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. 19.

of the dreadful secret, and intolerable must it have been whenever his melancholy reverie was broken by the questions of the lad, who would willingly beguile the way with talk, and had much to ask in passing through a strange country. As they approached the spot Isaac said, "Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for a burnt-offering?" "God will see for a sheep for himself for a burnt-offering, my child," answered the father; and with what agony must he have answered a question, which came so home to him, was put in the interesting curiosity of boyhood, the words of which might be among the last which he should hear from him, and were uttered when the place of dreadful sacrifice was before their eyes, and every step and every minute brought them sensibly nearer. At length the spot was reached. Abraham immediately built an altar there, placed the wood upon it, and bound Isaac, and set him on the top. And now his hand was stretched forth for the knife, when an angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham." And he answered, "Here am I." And he said, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, and do him no hurt; for now I know that thou fearest God, and hast not spared thine only begotten son for my sake." At that moment Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw a ram entangled with his horns in the thicket. He seized him, and offered him in the place of Isaac. This extraordinary scene has ever since been regarded with intense interest in God's Church, and every sincere believer has come to the same conclusion upon its meaning. We cannot pass it by without detailing those views

which have ever presented themselves to the faithful when they come to the contemplation of it.

In the first place it cannot be regarded as a private transaction, with which the universal Church has nothing to do. It is done through God's express interposition, and the human parties to it are the natural fathers of a mighty nation, the progenitors of the Redeemer of mankind, and spiritual fathers of the Church to the end of the world. Around that altar was indeed at the time unbroken solitude and silence. But to us it is surrounded with a throng of witnesses, with Jews and Gentiles, Latins and Greeks, of all tongues, and tribes, and climes, looking earnestly on, as on a scene in which their dearest and brightest hopes are concerned. There is going on a sacrifice, the sacrifice of an only begotten son, of a son conceived not according to nature, of a son of promise. It is offered on that range of mountain where afterwards stood the temple with its indwelling glory, typifying the body of the Redeemer with its enshrined Godhead; where was afterwards offered daily at morn and eve the lamb, yearly at the Passover the lamb, representative of the Lamb which taketh away the sins of the world; where afterwards in the fulness of time was offered the Son of God himself, the Saviour of the world. What though Scripture itself shall not have noticed this scene as an allegorical representation? Has Scripture exhausted the store of typical applications? Must we open no doors, because it has put the master-key into our hands? If the likeness be such as to strike the most careless, such that they who argue against it have nevertheless been moved by it

in the first instance, if it thus naturally and immediately suggest the anti-type, and nothing happens in God's Church in vain, much less when he presents himself by extraordinary interposition, how can we not discover herein the hand of God himself painting a lively picture for his Church to gaze upon: a picture on which they of the former days may look with hope, and they of the latter days with conviction? To us it is hung in our glorious gallery amid our ancestral pictures, which tell us our spiritual derivation through Patriarch and Jew, showing us how they felt and thought in common with us, how for them as well as for us, the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world, carrying us back to be one with Adam, and assuring us that if we are linked to him by sin and death, so also are we by grace and everlasting life. Side by side it stands with that of the brazen serpent, with that of the cloven and water-gushing rock, with that of the heaven descending manna, with that of the floating ark, all declaring to us through what a significant train of events our spiritual line has come.

And never did ancestral picture inspire nobler feelings. Here is our great spiritual forefather, viewing but dimly and through a long hazy distance the brightness of the glorious hopes which we see face to face, yet, even in such comparatively faint hope as was set before him, fulfilling to its utmost the command of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who hath bidden us to abandon all for his sake, to hate even father and mother for the love which we bear to him. There never was, and never can be to us an object of greater love, or of equal preciousness

with Isaac to Abraham. Shall we then repine when God demands it at our hands, and calls our nearest and dearest away, certain as we are that we shall receive them again, and certain with a distinctness far beyond that allowed to the faith of Abraham, and that we shall receive in substance from the dead, what he received in figure only. Let us remember that all which we do for Christ's sake, hard though it be, shall receive its recompence tenfold in the resurrection of the dead.

But not only as a type and a moral example, but also as a spiritual example does this act of Abraham come before us. Abraham by this set the seal to his faith. By that faith he had been already justified. But now that faith had produced its fruit of sanctification, and given birth to a work beyond which human ability can scarcely go. He had formerly believed in the certainty of God's word. He had now in the same belief acted upon it, and to such an extent as to do an act under God's commandment, which seemed to annul that very certainty. Thus his faith was proved to be a true and lively faith, and his justification was not now from works of disobedience, but upon a work of obedience. It was not now a mere acquittal, but an acceptance into high favour: not a remission of penalty, but the conferring of a reward. He had not indeed done more than required, and when all was done, was but an unprofitable servant. But God is pleased, and has covenanted to reward and bless every act, however imperfect, however solitary, if it have been but begun, continued, and ended in him. His faith was sound, having within the seed of good works. He was

justified, therefore, both on its first entertainment and again on its development into action. For as God on his part confers a twofold blessing, one in the promise of a gift, the other in the accomplishment, so man on his part receives from him a twofold blessing, one on the forming a good resolution, the other on performing it; and so intimately connected are these two, that the first has no value without the second. It is preliminary only, and introductory. Yet is it an inestimable blessing, because it is the beginning of a new and higher condition; it is the threshold of blessings, it is a capability conferred which before was utterly wanting towards pleasing God, it is the breath breathed into the nostrils, which may indeed depart again, but was never there before. Thus (says St. James<sup>1</sup>) was Abraham's faith perfected. It was completely operative; and indeed had now compassed a work which never could be exceeded. It had gone to the utmost pitch of action, and had now but to inspire and attend the duration of action.

Upon this act of Abraham, God solemnly by oath and distinctly, renewed his promise. The angel called out a second time to him from heaven, and said, "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars in heaven, and as the sand

<sup>1</sup> Ch. ii. 21. Whatever metaphysical difficulty may be thought to exist in reconciling James and Paul, there is none moral and practical.

which is upon the sea-shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice." The last clause declares that this blessing had hitherto been but one of capability. This act of faith made it one of possession.

Abraham returned with his son to Beersheba, or well of the oath, so named from the covenant here made concerning it with Abimelech. Here he had, as usual at his places of sojourning, built an altar to the Lord, to which he added also a grove, a harmless addition as yet, although their adoption by the heathen, and shameless purposes for which they were abused, caused Moses to order their extirpation. How long he continued here we are not told; but on the next occasion we find him in his old neighbourhood again, in Kirjath-arba, afterwards called Hebron, the capital of Judah, and place of the inauguration of her kings. Here he lost her who had been the aged companion of his wanderings ever since he had left Ur, his wife Sarah. She had reached the great age of 127. The provision which he made for her burial, singularly brings forth the manners and customs of the day, and discovers Abraham's strong feelings as to his being indeed but a sojourner. He had not a foot of ground in which to lay Sarah, and, as he strongly expresses it, to bury his dead out of his sight. He appeared, therefore, before the Council of the Sons of Heth or Hittites, and asked of them the possession of a burial-place. They felt themselves honoured by such a request from a mighty prince like Abraham, and offered him

the use of the tombs of the princes of the land. But Abraham would not be considered as a native. He was but a pilgrim and sojourner in the land of his posterity, dwelling in tabernacles, and not in cities, looking out for the city whose builder is God<sup>1</sup>. Nor would he take his rest among idolators. He therefore refused the offer, and asked to be allowed to buy from one of them named Ephron, the cave of Machpelah for a sepulchre. Ephron willingly offered it to him as a gift. But neither would he take it as such. He would be considered entirely as a stranger. At last he obtained it at the price of 400 shekels of silver, and there buried Sarah, close to their old residence at Mamre.

Isaac was now in his 37th year, and Abraham was anxious that he should not marry among his idolatrous neighbours. He knew, what it were well if every father would consider, the influence which a mother must and ought to have in forming the morals and religion of her children. And he was aware of the sad apostasy which took place as soon as the sons of Seth took wives from among the daughters of Cain. He was not long in finding an unblameable connexion. His brother Nachor, who had come out with him from Ur, and tarried in Haran, had there brought up a family in the fear and knowledge of the most High God. He sent his chief and confidential servant to Haran on this mission, having bound him by a solemn oath not to bring his son a wife from among the daughters of the Canaanites. It may seem strange that so important a matter, and one in

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. 16.

which there was so much room for imposition, should thus be left to the discretion and good faith of a slave. But Isaac from the custom of the East, which still remains among his children, wherever they be, needed not to choose for himself on such an occasion. And Abraham, stranger and pilgrim as he professedly was in the land of his children, could not return to Haran. The particulars of the slave's journey are very minutely given in Scripture, and open to us much of the beautiful simplicity of primitive times. It were a mangling of their beauty to abridge them, and they are too long to transcribe. The slave most faithfully executed his commission, and brought back Rebekah, the grand-daughter of Nachor. She accordingly became the wife of Isaac. This is the last event of consequence recorded of Abraham by Scripture. He had thus faithfully performed his duty in taking all possible precautions to secure the worship of the true God amongst his descendants; and among them it was found when the promised Redeemer set his feet upon our earth. After Sarah's death he took to wife Keturah his bondwoman, by whom he had six sons, progenitors of tribes. Having given each of these a good provision, he took care to send them eastward out of the way of Isaac. His sons found them in their several settlements in their march from Egypt to take possession of the promised land. He lived to see his grandsons, Esau and Jacob, nearly arrived at man's estate, and died at the age 175. His son Ishmael came to join with Isaac in the last rites. They buried him with Sarah in the sepulchre of the cave of Machpelah.

The character of Abraham is deeply impressed

with that determined perseverance which has ever since marked his posterity. Never was man put to a greater trial, and never did man so victoriously overcome. In obedience to God he willingly quitted the comforts of a settled habitation, and gave himself up to the disquiet and peril of a wanderer upon earth, of a stranger to the people among whom he dwelt. But he kept his eye steadily fixed upon that better and heavenly country, on that city which God had built for him. He leaned entirely on God's promises, which, however distant in fulfilment, were by faith brought near, so that he saw the day of his Redeemer, and was glad. To him we ourselves, living at this distance of nearly 40 centuries, are indebted as spiritual sons. May we follow the good example of such a father, of so patient a learner on God's word, of so perfect a model of enduring hope; and considering ourselves to be in reality pilgrims and sojourners equally with him in this world below, never lose sight of our heavenly home, never take our watchful eye away from that Redeemer, who shall at the last day stand upon the earth, and lead his pilgrims into the land of everlasting rest. And may we leave behind us a spiritual posterity, begotten of the holy word of God, to carry down from age to age the pure doctrines and ordinances of his Church, which has been founded upon the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.

## ESAU.

B. C. 1759.

MELANCHOLY indeed is it to turn from the joy with which Abraham received the promise of the Redeemer, to the utter recklessness of its value shown by his first-born grandson; and this too, when it had received additional fulness of assurance by its repetition to Isaac. Cain stands out in infamous celebrity as the first man who practically illustrated both the heinousness and penalty of Adam's transgression, by taking the life of his brother. And Esau no less exhibits in himself the ignoble model after which have been formed all they who care not for the blessing of a Redeemer, and despise the promises of God. His example is an awful warning to every child of Adam. His character is not marked by any grievous viciousness as that of Cain's. On the contrary, it is equal to that of the generality of men, and superior to that of many. It is marked with much kind and generous feeling, and especially with that rare and redeeming quality, the forgiveness of injury. In his case the wrong was gross and irreparable, and the more stinging, from the base fraud through which it was wrought. Yet this only makes the warning more fearful. In every case indeed middle characters are most instructive, be-

cause with much to warn, they have also something whereby to stimulate.

The endurance of Isaac's faith was tried, like his father's, by the barrenness of Rebekah for twenty years. At last the Lord granted his earnest prayer, and she conceived and bare twins. Even in the womb they made a prelude of their future differences by struggling there, and their birth was equally ominous. Esau came forth first, but Jacob in coming forth took hold of him by the heel. Their characters started asunder from the womb. Esau's exterior was savage and rough, and his pursuits were in accordance with it. He became a cunning hunter, a man of the field, as Scripture expressively terms it. The chase absorbed all his mind, occupied all his thoughts. Such a life was irreconcilable with high religious feelings. There is no mode of life more adverse to them. The man is thus brought down to the level of the brutes whom he pursues. To outwit them is the highest exertion of his understanding. He adapts his mind to theirs, and glories in unravelling the doublings of their little cunning. His animal instincts and lower faculties are indeed quickened by the shifts and expedients of such a life. But this is always at the expence of the higher. They cannot co-exist. They are the separate possessions of rude and of civilized man. The continual variety attending such a pursuit creates an impatience and caprice which is utterly opposed to the calm steady character of the servant of God and ruler of fellow-men. He must be formed in a very different school. God and man must be the objects of his pursuit, and the Spirit of God and the

mind of man, being ever tracked by his mind, continually will lead it to higher and higher ground. Such was the school of Jacob, who in utter contrast to the man of the field was a dweller in tents. He was a domestic man, a contemplative man. He was forming himself for the due exercise of the privileges of the first-born. His habits were qualifying him for the duties of civil and religious head of the family, and especially as a suitable transmitter of the glorious promises of God, which he had learned to appreciate. Esau on the contrary was as studiously disqualifying himself. He was frank and generous, as most hunters are; but he was also thoughtless, as they commonly are. He was an affectionate son; but he made his duty subservient to his favourite passion. He regularly supplied his father with food from the chase; but his duty went no higher. He saw no more in Isaac than what any of the unbelievers saw in their fathers. He beheld in him a just object of all his care and fond cherishing. But he saw not in him the channel of unspeakable spiritual blessings, which himself in due time should as heir transmit to posterity. Ever abroad as he was among the beasts of the field, how should he be taken from such company to be priest, and prophet, and king? How should he rule and instruct? How should he intercede in prayer and sacrifice? How should he be the conservator of oracles which he cared not to understand? Thus was he preparing the way for his own deposition; and it shortly took place in a manner more disgraceful than has ever befallen deposed monarch since.

He came in one day weary and faint with the

chase, and meeting Jacob with some pottage in his hand, entreated of him to give him that pottage. Jacob insisted on having his birth-right in exchange; and so little did Esau appreciate it (nay, perhaps, looked on its domestic and spiritual duties as a burden gladly to be put on another's back), that he immediately sold it, and ratified the sale with an oath. With Jacob's conduct on this occasion we have no concern. It does not in any way excuse Esau's, who proved himself at once a profane and irreligious despiser of all that was sacred, noble, and exalted, and a selfish creature of the hour. How slight was the proof with which God tried him! How little must have been either his love or fear, who could so despise such gifts. How brutal his appetites, how mean his understanding! It is impossible to pity him who could not feel for himself. But alas, God's Church has never been, and never will be, without its Esaus. It will always have amongst its family too many who will exchange the spiritual blessings to which they are heirs for the momentary gratifications of this world. On these they have bent all their thoughts, and in some unguarded hour (if indeed any hour be not unguarded with them), the loud importunate demands of immediate worldly enjoyment come in direct competition with the hopes and promises of the world to come, and they have bartered the heavenly for the earthly. "I am at the point to die," they cry, life cannot be sustained without it, is their excuse, however trifling the value; what compared with this is their heavenly birthright, which is absolutely burdensome from the duties which it requires? It requires temperance,

meditation, fasting, prayer, giving of alms, reading of the word, and all these are incompatible with the chase to which they have addicted themselves. Alas, up from the reckless godless nominal Christian, who is scarcely conscious of his birthright, to the serious but still irresolute believer who, in the agony of his fiery trial, accepts any thing of this mortal life, even life itself, on terms inconsistent with his hopes of eternal life, many have been the Esaus in God's Church : many there are, and many there will be.

Esau shortly acted upon this abdication. We saw how careful Abraham had been to prevent his son from marrying among the idolatrous Canaanites. The very first thing which Esau did, on arriving at his father's age of marriage, was to take two wives from among the Hittites, a Canaanitish tribe. This caused great grief to his parents. But Esau was precisely that son which is the scourge of parents. He was utterly thoughtless. Such a character is too often too lightly dealt with. It is very commonly conceived to have great disinterestedness. This, however, is merely an appearance, arising from the person seeming so often his own enemy. Was he, or could he, ever be another's friend (in the true sense of that word) ? In fact, this is a case of the extreme of selfishness, which contracts even self to the self of the present moment. For the man of the next it has no thought. The apostle (Heb. xii. 16), has called Esau a fornicator and profane man, and well does he deserve the title. This act of his was a repetition of the buying the mess of pottage. Immediate gratification was all he sought. He cared not

what evil, spiritual or moral, he brought into his family. He thought not of the offspring of his marriage. He thought not of the sorrow and displeasure of his parents. He thought not of God's will and commandments. He cared not that the Redeemer should come from his loins. A second time, therefore he threw away his birthright. He could not wait to go to the country of his own family, and thence take a believing wife, as his father had done. He must at any rate incontinently indulge his passion. His marriage, therefore, was unblest by father, and by mother, and by God. It was unlawful in every way; it was in reality no marriage. If he were fruitful and multiplied, then he replenished the earth with an idolatrous seed. It was no other than fornication and profaneness.

Esau however was at length awakened to a sense of his degradation; but not from reflection, not from any high-minded appreciation of his loss, not from any spiritual compunction. His loss was brought home to him, as to a reckless carnal man, by the forfeit of one of the outward and inferior appurtenances of his birthright. And this he incurred from engagement in that very same pursuit through which he had originally abdicated that privilege. He was his father's favourite (as Jacob was his mother's); but from a most unworthy cause: he supplied him with venison; thus Isaac almost unwittingly, perhaps, encouraged him in those habits which so utterly disqualified him for the first-born. Even for so paltry a gratification, many fathers, are easy and content to leave their children destitute of the knowledge and discipline which his station required, because they found him useful in some

comparatively trifling service ? Could he complain of his having married so unfortunately ?

But he had now another penalty to pay, in seeing his favourite son utterly stript, and that through his own word and deed, of the privileges of which a father's indulgence had rendered him unworthy ; here lay Isaac's infirmity, and here he found its punishment : he neglected a great duty, and reaped a merited retribution. Isaac was now one hundred and thirty-seven years old, and his sight had failed him. Being in daily expectation of death, he one day sent for Esau, and told him to go to the chase and procure him some venison, that he might eat, and bless him before he died. He still looked upon him as his successor in Abraham's blessing. He had indeed disobeyed his injunctions, and brought a slur upon his title by his marriage ; but God had not declared his displeasure, and the sale of his birthright was most probably never known to Isaac. While Esau was absent upon his errand, Jacob, at his mother's instigation, disguised himself as to touch, and the smell of his garments, so as to pass for Esau. He brought him savoury food, and received the blessing of his first-born. " God give thee of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine. Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee. Be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down unto thee. Cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee <sup>1</sup>." Shortly after this had been irrevocably bestowed, Esau entered with his dish. On this ensued a scene of painful recognition. Isaac trembled exceedingly when his mind misgave him,

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxvii. 28.

and he found out the cheat which had been put upon him, and Esau burst into a lamentable cry of despair, when he found that the blessing had gone from him. He had returned faint and weary from the chase, yet delighted with the thoughts of gratifying his aged father, and of receiving the blessing. He found himself forestalled in both. Well indeed may he weep and raise a bitter cry, and ask, "Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me also." But the blessing which carried on the promises made to Abraham was beyond Isaac's power of recall. God also was a party to it, and therefore it was not in the power of man to change it. Indeed from Esau's expression, he seems to have understood or cared little of the spiritual part of the blessing, for that could be but one and for one. It was of the temporal part only that he recked. He had lost his birthright. He was put in subjection to his brother. The eyes and knees of servants which had regarded him as their future lord, must now be turned upon his brother. He felt himself degraded. In all the range of history there is not a more instructive scene than this. In the Epistle to the Hebrews it is held out in solemn warning to Christians to beware how they exchange their immortal birthright for the trifles of this world, lest they lose it irrevocably, even as Esau, who found it gone beyond all recall. Neither his own prayers and tears, nor his father's earnest wishes, could restore it. It is in effect the same blessing to Esau and to the Christian. Only to the one it conveyed an interest in the Redeemer to come in the latter days: to the other in the Redeemer who has come in the latter days, and

shall come again upon the last day. But this scene is full of stirring interest, as being quite domestic, a mere family transaction, such as may happen any where at any time, and yet pregnant with most important consequences to the world. From this sick chamber our mental view stretches over an immense field of history. The doom of two mighty nations was decided here. Events which passed in the secret recesses of families, and seemed confined there, persons unconscious of the importance of their words and deeds, have become mighty revolutions, busy actors, which have turned the world upside down. It was not now the last time that such mean agents as a mother's partiality, a father's feebleness, the unfair dealing of a brother, impelled the grand current of the fortunes of mankind. But in this family event were concerned not only the temporal but even the eternal interests of man. And do not the events of home at this day sway those mighty interests? Have our homes never sent forth, prepared by holy discipline, and formed by its events, some faithful preacher of God's Gospel, whose words will dwell in the ears, and burn in the hearts of good men to the end of the world, and be the blessed means of bringing many over to salvation? Or again, alas the sad contrast, have they not shaped by their events and daily conversation some promulgator of infidelity, who even when dead, yet speaketh, (how differently from Abel!) venting blasphemy, and daily leading immortal souls into the same horrible gulf into which himself has fallen. Home is the laboratory of the world. Let parents never forget this. After much tears and entreaty Esau received such fragments as remained

from the full feast of his brother. Isaac blessed him and said, "Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; and by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother: and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck<sup>1</sup>." All which was literally fulfilled in himself and his posterity. The Edomites, or Idumæans, his descendants, were conquered by David, and asserted their independence in the reign of Jehoram, 900 years after the delivery of this prophecy by Isaac. One portion he had in common with Jacob, the fatness of the earth and of the dew from heaven; the grossness he received, but none of the dignity or spirituality. His person was not made sacred, as was Jacob's, by the prayer, "cursed be he that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee." On the contrary, he was to be, like Ishmael, a robber: he was to live by his sword: and, therefore, to have every man's hand against him. Jacob was invested with royal and priestly sacredness, as the progenitor of the great King and Priest, and Esau was allotted the adventurous and perilous life of the soldier of fortune. This was all which was left for him. Nothing better could he obtain. No wonder that his wrath was kindled against his brother, and was the more fierce, because he had been supplanted by disingenuous artifice. A wrong committed by fraud, insults the understanding, at the same time that it wounds the heart. It is therefore less tolerable than one offered through open violence.

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxvii. 39, 40.

Here however breaks out a good trait in his character, which shows a frank and generous temper. Although he determined, in the heat of his anger, to kill his brother; yet he did not coldly and resolutely make up his mind to it. He did not keep it secret and rankling at the bottom of his heart until occasion offered. He did not dissemble, and fondle his brother, so to dispel his fears, and keep him within reach until the favourable moment: lying in ambush like the tiger with his eye ever upon his victim, until the time for the fatal spring. But he gave his fiery indignation vent in words which were overheard, and gave warning. So that it was a mere threat, the overboiling of the wrath of his heart: and not a resolution fixed at the bottom of it. His heart was relieved by the vent thus given of its rankling bile: and a little time and absence would restore it to its former calmness. Rachel understood his temper, and hearing of his words, took the means of removing the irritating object until (as she says) his anger should turn away from Jacob, and he should forget that which he had done unto him. She expressed her fears to Isaac of Jacob also marrying among the Canaanites. The old man was immediately alarmed. He sent for Jacob, and after giving him a charge not to take a wife of the daughters of Canaan, bade him go to the place whence Abraham had chosen a wife for himself, and there take to wife one of the daughters of Laban, who was his mother's brother. Having solemnly renewed the transmitted blessing of Abraham, he despatched him to Padan-aram, Rebekah's country. All these particulars were known to Esau, and coming upon his previous dis-

appointments, at length convinced him that he was wrong in taking a wife from the daughters of Canaan. He therefore now went and took one from among his kinsfolk, as his father had commanded Jacob to do. He added to his wives Mahaleth, the daughter of Ishmael. This was much better than his former marriages among idolators. And yet, the progeny of this would inherit from one side the promise that he should be a wild man, and his hand against every man, and every man's hand against his, and on the other the promise that he should live by his sword. Thus the Church of God, if it was not to suffer, was not to profit by his marriage. In nothing that he did does he seem to have had any notion of consulting spiritual motives.

After this we find Esau settled in Seir, a rocky district which lay south of Canaan : how he obtained it, whether by his sword, according to the prophecy, or by other means, is not said. While he was here he received messengers from Jacob, who was now returning from Padan-aram, along the east of the Jordan, and making for Mamre. The message imported that he was become wealthy during his absence, and now wished to return into favour with him. Esau immediately set out to meet him with 400 men. The object of this force does not seem to have been either to awe or to slay Jacob, nor to guard against treachery on his side; it may rather be gathered from Esau's proposal afterwards to Jacob to leave some of his men with him<sup>1</sup>, that it was to afford a safe conduct to his brother through a wild and imperfectly settled country. The report of such a force very

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxxiii. 15.

much alarmed Jacob, who instantly made dispositions for the escape of some of his party, and sent a magnificent present to his brother. When next morning he heard of his close approach he drew up his people in order, and putting himself at their head, and advancing, bowed himself to the ground seven times before him. Full of generous affection Esau ran forward to meet him, embraced him, and fell upon his neck and kissed him ; and they wept. Yet how different must have been their feelings. Jacob had grievously injured his brother, and by the grace of God's holy Spirit, was thoroughly sorry for that his misdoing. He was now seeking to make all reparation in his power, and, if need be, to surrender his life into his hands. He had thrown himself entirely into his power, to deal with him as he chose. When therefore he was so fondly clasped in his arms, and looked up into his frank and forgiving countenance, how must his heart have burst in twain, how must he have sobbed with the remembrance of the injury which he had done him, and almost sunk to the ground with remorse and shame. Plenteous must have been the bitterness which mingled with the sweetness of this meeting. Esau on the other hand, being of a generous though hasty temper, had from long absence lost the sting of his injury. His wrath had yielded to a longing for his once-loved brother. Perhaps he had been long pitying him, entering into his bitter feelings of repentance, and desiring to assuage them. As he little understood the real and spiritual value of the blessing which he had lost, and

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxxiii. 15.

had obtained, and was now enjoying in Seir, a good earnest of the carnal blessing which he had received, he had less reason than ever to keep up his angry feeling. When therefore he lifted up his eyes, and saw him once again, all his wrongs were instantly forgotten. He held in his arms his beloved brother, the companion of the days of his childhood. He thought of their common aged father, and seemed to hold in Jacob a part and representative of him. When he looked into his face and saw his anguish, he felt perhaps as generous men, ever so wronged, will towards the penitent, and took blame upon himself for the cause of so much sorrow. Thus with different feelings the two brothers hung upon each other and wept. It is the first fraternal reconciliation which meets us in Scripture. But their quarrel had not been the first. And this scene is doubly pleasing on that account. Death, violent death, closed the first breach of brotherly love. But now grace, and mercy, and love, overcame all other and worse affections, and effected a reconciliation. Esau on his road had met the long train of Jacob's present. And he now asked him, "What meanest thou by all this drove which I met?" Jacob answered, that they were sent to find grace in his sight. "I have enough, my brother," replied Esau, "keep that thou hast unto thyself." Thus Esau at first refused his present from Jacob. He had already made him a present which he valued above all price, the present of a reconciled brother. But he yielded to the earnest entreaties of his brother, willing to take all load from his heart by accepting this token of satisfaction. For his brother's sake he accepted, and not for his

own: he had enough. His father's blessing had already wrought, and he had received of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven.

It is impossible not to admire the frankness and generosity of Esau on this occasion, and not to be disappointed on finding it met on Jacob's part with a suspicious reserve, which was the main defect in the character of that excellent and pious man. Unwilling again to lose his brother so lately recovered, Esau proposed to Jacob that he should accompany him to Seir. Jacob excused himself from his company, by saying, that his children, and his cattle big with young, would be unable to proceed immediately, or keep up with him, and therefore promised that he would follow him at leisure to Seir. Esau then proffered to leave some of his men with him to guide him in safety. This too Jacob refused. Esau then departed, and went to Seir, expecting Jacob to follow him. Jacob, however, instead of going southward towards Seir, made straightway for the Jordan, and after having tarried for some time on its hither bank, at a place named Succoth, so called from the booths which he set up there for his cattle, crossed the river, and pushed forward to Shechem, and there established himself, building an altar for religious worship, according to the custom of his grandfather Abraham, who in this very neighbourhood, as we have seen, raised one of those altars, by which he ever consecrated his place of abode. Great allowance must be made for this seemingly disingenuous and unkind conduct of Jacob. He being now the heir of promise, it was his duty to take up his abode in the land of promise, for so had God enjoined Abraham,

and through him his successors. Jacob, therefore, could not go to Seir to reside there : nor would Esau have readily parted with him, when he once had him there. And yet Jacob could not venture to tell his brother the real cause : for this would be to renew the memory of the grievance, which had been a moment ago so happily adjusted. He may, perhaps, have been quite sincere in his answer to Esau. But cool reflection may have afterwards suggested what he had forgotten in the hurry and tumultuous delight of the meeting with his brother. Thus for the second time they parted. A third time they met, and it appears to have been the last. Isaac died in extreme old age, having reached his 181st year, at Mamre, where his father and mother had also died, and were buried. Jacob and Esau met, as Isaac and Ishmael had before, to bury their father. The inheritor and the disinherited met to pay the last sad rites. Such are bitter meetings. The wounds of brotherly affection bleed afresh. Here, however, the dispossession of Esau was not so visible, as in the common cases of worldly ejection. The possession of the land was distant, not to come for several generations, and of the spiritual bequest Esau had too little apprehension to be much concerned about its loss. They parted as brothers and friends ; and their children met as enemies. This was the second and last time that the family of Abraham branched off into two separate portions of mankind, one of which carried the great spiritual blessing, the other only a carnal blessing. Both were to be mighty nations. But one was to be a holy nation of spiritual priests and kings : the other

a nation of wild men who lived by their sword. But the posterity of Esau was more fortunate than that of Ishmael. They were afterwards reunited to the children of Jacob : they were incorporated into God's Church, and shared in the joy of the Redeemer's coming. They even gave a king to Judah in the person of Herod. They bore with their faithful brethren, in due time, the cross of redemption ; while the seed of Ishmael is at this day bearing the crescent of apostasy. The two brothers now once again parted on their different destinies, to the right hand and to the left, the one in all the glory of spiritual exaltation, the other in the shame of degradation. And so have many brothers parted since on their different directions of life : this to wealth, and that to poverty ; this to honour, and that to dishonour ; this to godliness, and that to ungodliness. The same home sent forth, alas ! on what opposite courses : the believing and the unbelieving Herberts ; the sweetest songster of God's temple, and the foulest blasphemer of his honour ; the first-born threw away in contempt his spiritual birthright, and his younger brother succeeded in his place.

In Esau we see too common a character. He was one of those thoughtless men who are said to have no harm in them, and yet do themselves and their friends more harm than enemies ever could do. They are frank and open from utter carelessness. They are unsuspicious from want of observation and reflection. They are generous not upon principle. but from want of principle : they are in consequence capricious and fickle, continually led away from the straight line of duty to this side and to

that, by whatever inducement comes in their way : they have neither past nor future : they are therefore ready to forget and forgive, but not to repent and amend ; they are forward to trust, but not to provide. The present hour is all with them, and all beyond it, both on this and on that side of the grave, both temporal and spiritual, is completely out of sight. They are the continual victims to temptation, the constant dupes to the designing, and, if they bring not ruin on themselves and their friends, yet keep them in perpetual and wearisome anxiety, looking at their course with the same painful feeling as they would see them running blindfold over ground beset with frightful chasms and precipices. They are a thorn in the side of all who are interested in them. Very many such lose their earthly birthright. Alas ! how many their heavenly ! Such are the Esaus of the moral world. But the spiritual world has also its Esaus. None of us can adequately prize the privileges to which we have been born in Christ, or hold them sufficiently near in view, so as not sometimes to prefer some nearer and less spiritual prize. To keep them ever in mind, and at their due value, requires long experience and reflection, much painful reading of the word, habits of earnest and frequent prayer. Beelzebub will not drive out Beelzebub, nor will all our worldly prudence, judgment and discrimination, assist us in putting on the proper value. We must shut out the spirit of the world, and obtain the in-dwelling of the spirit of the light and life of the world to come. What then must be the case with those who have never taken thought upon the value of their spiritual privileges, who are

almost as little conscious of them, as they are of the sensation which they felt, when the baptismal water was poured upon them. What must their life be but a continual barter of God's sure and certain promises for the fleeting things of this life. When too late, when the spiritual world is forced upon the view, then is suddenly seen the preciousness of its privileges, and the dreadful penalty of having forfeited them, and there is found no place for repentance. Nor prayers nor tears can restore the loss. With serious resolutions of redeeming the time while yet it be allowed us, let us accept from the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, his fearful application of Esau's rejection; and whenever the pleasure or interest of the world points one way, and our love and duty to our crucified Master another, let us remember Esau.

## ELI.

B. C. 1214—1116.

THE temporal portion of the promise made to Abraham, and renewed to Isaac and Jacob, had now been long fulfilled. Their posterity was settled in the promised land. They were no longer sojourners and dwellers in tents, but had long had cities and towns divided amongst them. The 430 years of captivity and oppression, had been succeeded by nearly as many of independence, if we except some partial interruptions caused by the sins of the people, who no less politically than religiously had neglected the express commands of God. At this period we find Eli, at the head of both Church and state, as being both High Priest, and supreme judge of Israel. Brief as are the notices of him in Scripture, quite enough is told to form a lesson both fearful and instructive to parents and to children. The High Priesthood which had gone in the eldest branch of the house of Aaron, and had been solemnly confirmed to Phinehas, for his zeal for God's honour<sup>1</sup>, had by some misconduct of his descendants, been taken away and conferred upon Eli<sup>2</sup>, who was of the younger branch, that of Ithamer. Eli was therefore bound in a still more especial manner than any of

<sup>1</sup> Num. xxv. 13.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Sam. ii. 80.

his predecessors to maintain with all zeal and vigilance the cause of his heavenly Master. But although a man of eminent piety, he suffered, in his latter days, both indolence and irresolution to overcome his earnest desire for the welfare and purity of God's Church ; and he paid the forfeit with his life and the degradation of his family.

He had two sons. One was named Hophni, the other was the unworthy bearer of the glorious name of Phinehas. Being born in a high sovereign station they were exposed to all the tempters and temptations which beset princes, and too often render them the corruptors rather than the guardians of public morals. And they verified to a lamentable accuracy the observation which every reader of history must have made, how commonly exemplary fathers are succeeded by unworthy sons. Without doubt the unexpected contrast of character causes such instances to be more noticed, and makes them appear comparatively more numerous than they are. But still many moral causes contribute to the prevalence of such instances. The sons have not undergone the hardy discipline of the father. On the contrary the greatness of the father necessarily surrounds the son with flatterers and corruptors, and in greater number and more dangerous in proportion to his greatness. The public duties and station of the father do not allow that frequent and near oversight of his children, which is in the power of private persons, and yet at the same time it is more requisite. We cannot on these grounds be surprised that Eli, and Samuel, and David were afflicted with degenerate sons. But even in private life, the

badness of the sons of good men has been often remarked. Nor ought we to wonder at it. The very order and discipline of a holy home, methodical and unrelaxed as it is and should be, assimilates so much the daily conversation of its inmates, that it leaves them ignorant of dispositions, which are latent but not suppressed, and the secret spark bursts into flame upon the first contact with the fiery trial of the world. Then the very strictness with which they have been brought up at home, makes them give a freer rein to their passions. Besides that the wound to their conscience having been more severe than to other sinners, their fall is more astounding and bewildering. They are filled with the recklessness of despair. A deep sense of shame of appearing before God, an acute sense of his aversion, drives them to a greater distance still from his presence. Even in their childhood, if they mix with others, they are subject to continual ridicule on every point connected with the holiness of the office or character of their parent, and, if not endued with more than common strength of character, are driven to study a contrast in order to rid themselves of a persecution which the joyous age of boyhood can ill brook or bear. It is delightful, however, to find how frequently the victory of the world over their unsuspecting innocence has been but temporary. The defeat has been given by surprise, and not in a pitched battle. The vanquished has not therefore lost heart and courage, nor has the vanquisher been able to carry from him all his godly ammunition. The mischievous birds may have rooted up some of the seeds sown in his heart, but they have rooted up together with

them the cankering worm, and the harvest is abundant from the damage.

Thus possibly the very holiness of Eli, no less than his exalted station, was the cause of the sad contrast of the lives of his sons. The world in its most powerful shapes of temptation was at hand every moment to pluck out his words from their hearts, and sear their consciences with wilful sin against light, and truth, and knowledge. They exhibited a sad and scandalous example in the face of all Israel. Even their holy office of priesthood they converted into a ministry to their corrupt appetites. In exacting their portion of the offerings at sacrifice, they did it with a greedy and iniquitous extortion, such that men forsook the temple, and desisted from sacrifice. They loathed and abhorred a rite so profaned, nor could they think that the Lord would accept any thing from such unworthy and polluted hands. But they went yet farther. It was the custom for the women to assemble at the door of the tabernacle, and there wait upon God with prayer<sup>1</sup>. These, whom it was their duty to instruct, and help, and encourage in their spirit of holy devotion, they debauched; and thus God's house became as an idolatrous temple of the heathen, where the most infamous prostitution was customary, and his priests as their priests. The scandal which such conduct created in Israel can scarcely be expressed. The good mourned and grieved and kept themselves in sorrow away from a place where such impieties met their eyes, and which they may well expect every

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. i. 9. 12; ii. 22. St. Luke ii. 37.

moment to fall and crush its polluters. The bad rejoiced that the service of their God was now as agreeable and easy as that of any heathen god, whose lustful rites they had most longed after; or were glad of the excuse for abandoning altogether the worship of the Lord God. Considering how the idolator was still in the land, with his corrupt worship and all its horrible abominations, ready to insinuate itself through the smallest opening left by the negligence of God's ministers, what must have been the disastrous effects now, when the flood-gates were thrown wide open to the full tide of ungodliness. Eli was at this time in extreme old age, and probably his sons were his chief channel of intercourse with the people. He may, therefore, be excused for not having immediately interfered. They would take good care to block up every avenue to him of information of their doings. At last, he did hear what his sons had done unto all Israel. But did he put on the stern authority of the father; did he as High Priest rebuke and degrade them in the name of the Lord; did he as supreme ruler of the people avenge the violence of which they had been guilty? Far from it. He sent for them and said, "Why do ye such things. For I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him, but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him<sup>1</sup>?" How languid is this chiding, how miserably weak and defective this

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. ii. 23—25.

expostulation, how does it betray his duty, as civil and religious sovereign ! Of course, they disregarded it, and went on in their infatuation of wickedness. He should have executed judgment on the Lord's behalf, and not insinuated to them the Lord's judgment upon them. He forgot the honour of God, and sacrificed the love of God to the love of his children. How apt are parents to identify these two loves, even when they are most opposed. It is true that a just and real love for others can never be inconsistent with the love of God, for it is included under it, as the less under the greater : it is spiritual, and therefore looks on them as immortal spirits, regards their eternal welfare, places them with themselves in the invisible world before God, and dreads an everlasting separation. To ensure this eternal union of love it will risk any chance of temporary hatred here. But for this pure and heavenly love is too often substituted a base counterfeit, a spurious earthly love, a mere worldly, yea animal fondness. This looks but to worldly welfare : this is slow to rebuke for fear of an earthly separation : dreads giving pain lest itself be pained : shrinks from duty lest duty seem unlovely. It is the slavish love mixed with fear. Perfect love towards man, as being a part of perfect love towards God, casteth out fear. It is the exercise upon those whom we do see of that affection which we bear towards him whom we do not see : and the true son of God thanks God for every opportunity of doing unto others for his sake what he has done for him. But how especially does the exhibition of such love become the ministers of God, whose public profession

is an intelligent and faithful service to him. Other men attract little notice by inordinate love towards their own, and little therefore can they disparage God before man. But his minister, looked up to for a pattern of faithful stewardship to his Master, cannot but bring either his own fidelity or God's glory into question. When they are seen bearing with such as are openly acting contrary to the interests of God's service, who are pulling down as fast as they build up, what shall men think? Surely either lightly of their fidelity, or of the importance of God's service.

But there were perhaps other and more excusable reasons for this slackness in his duty on the part of Eli. It is probable that his sons had gradually gained the dominion over his age which so much stood in need of their help, and had even insensibly usurped his power as judge. Except by a bold and vigorous exertion, which was beyond the effort of the sluggishness of his time of life, he could not reinstate himself. Their impetuous and overbearing temper quite overawed the timid old man. Yet a zeal for God's insulted honour should have roused him, and had he sought only his glory, he would not have feared any thing which men could do. He would have asserted it by word and deed in the face of the congregation.

A very different rebuke from that with which Eli met his sons was now given by God to him. A prophet was sent to announce the displeasure of God, and pronounce judgment upon him and his posterity for his indifference to God's honour. A sad train of calamities is foretold. The loss of the

ark itself, the ruin of his family, its deprivation of the priesthood, its degradation into the ranks of the lowest poverty, and, as a sign and token of these, the deaths of Hophni and Phinehas in one day, are declared. In those days God openly revealed his counsels. And these things are written for our learning, that we may be assured how God deals with our sins, although he may not express his displeasure. Our tree may be green and flourishing—many may admire and enjoy its shade and shelter, but God's mark and number has been put upon it, and like Eli's it has been destined to the axe. Let, above all, the minister of God take warning from this awful message, how he bears with the sins of his children, and allows them to remain a scandal and stumbling-block to his neighbours. His line, like Eli's may cease to produce faithful and spiritual priests unto God. Its stream has been corrupted at its source. Has it never happened that several generations of profligates could be traced up to some eminent preacher of the word? Let him make himself present in his imagination to so dreadful a futurity. Let him see himself placed at the head of a file which ends in some notorious infidel, whose works are undoing much more than his have done or may be doing. Let him behold posterity gazing in amazement and sorrow at such a genealogy age after age, and all the good and wise lamenting the dishonour done to God, and injury to man by the writings of his descendant. Could a judgment more terrible fall upon a good man? Eli's conduct led morally no less than judicially to the spiritual overthrow of his house. And so will his. The example

of such characters as Eli is the more instructive, as in their life-time it is less remarked. The world sympathises with their human but unspiritualized affections. They are also endowed with bright and shining qualities which throw a splendour of holiness around them, and dazzle to their defects: while those qualities are active, but the defects passive. It is not until these last have produced some bitter fruit in their children or among posterity, that they are noted, and then become in the page of history, as Eli's are, a prominent feature. The man of his own days and the man of posterity thus appears sometimes quite in two different characters.

His successor in his judicial character was at that moment in the tabernacle, waiting upon him. Samuel, the son of Elkanah, a Levite, had been presented and dedicated to the Lord by his mother Hannah, according to vow. As soon as he was weaned she took him up to Shiloh (where the tabernacle had been ever since the days of Joshua), and there left him, to be brought up in ministry unto the Lord before Eli. The boy grew up in wisdom and stature, and in favour both with God and men<sup>1</sup>. In him Eli must have seen a glaring contrast to his profligate sons. His holy innocence, his watchful dutifulness, the grace, and purity, and truth, which came from his lips, must have sorely reminded him of all the opposite qualities which were exhibited by his reprobate sons, and bowed his heart in prostrate humiliation before the Lord. Great, however, must have been the comfort of such an attendant on the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. ii. 21. 26.

solitude of the old man, and beautiful is this conjunction of childhood and old age, of yet untainted innocence and godliness, with sincere and broken-hearted repentance. Through this child, Eli received a second message from the Lord. He was in attendance upon Eli. The old man had lain down, the lamp of God was just burning out, and Samuel had also laid himself down, when the Lord called "Samuel." The boy, not knowing the word of the Lord, nor having had it yet revealed to him, thought that Eli had called him, and went to him; and thus he was called, and went three times. On the third call, however, Eli plainly perceived that the Lord had called the child, and gave him directions for answering him. In the morning Samuel feared to tell Eli the message of the Lord, so full of denunciation was it against his house. Eli, however, commanded him to tell forth his communication. It confirmed that of the prophet, and added to it the threat of an event close at hand, which God would bring to pass in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heard it should tingle. Eli accepted from the boy with pious humiliation and unfeigned resignation this stern irrevocable sentence of God. "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good," he exclaimed. He had God's honour and glory at heart, although he wanted the resolute activity to maintain it. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done," was his earnest prayer, although not his practice. The main defect in his character was passiveness, and this, while it prevented him from asserting the cause of God as he ought, yet inclined him to utter and holy submission to his judgments.

He patiently acquiesced in his punishment, acknowledged its justice, and freely confessed his own unworthiness and sins of omission. God's sentence was quickly put into execution. The Philistines, the most formidable enemy of Israel, were again in the field. Israel met them, and was sorely defeated. How far the corruption of the sons of Eli had spread appears from what followed. As soon as the army had returned to the camp, the Elders convoked a council, and in this they came to the infatuated resolution of carrying the ark of God into the field. Their folly and impiety would force God to defend his own dwelling-place. They treated him exactly in the same superstitious and uncereemonious way as the heathen did their gods. They would compel his will to their own devices. They would make a charm of his ark. But they were not singular. Thus has God been treated by his own people in all ages. They have claimed his aid and authority in the most iniquitous enterprises. They have put him, as far as in them lay, in the midst of their host, carried him into the fight, and on shoulders as hateful to him as those of Hophni and Phinehas. He has been proclaimed as the abetting and patron Deity on occasions which his soul abhorred: men have sung "Te Deum" at the close of a horrible massacre, and howled his holy name, and boasted his presence among them, amid deeds at which humanity shudders.

Eli did not dispute the authority of the council when they came for the ark. Probably, although both High Priest and judge, his prerogative did not extend so far as to put a negative on the decree of

such an assembly. But we can hardly suppose him not to have remonstrated with the insane wickedness of such a proposal, and especially with his sons. They, however, and all the rest by their example, had long, in the unbridled strength of presumption, domineered over the feebleness of his old age, and scorned his advice, and disregarded his authority. So God gave them all up to a reprobate mind, so that seeing they should not see, and hearing they should not understand. He left them to their own devices, by them to work out his judgments upon themselves. Considering, however, the dimness of Eli's sight, they might have taken away the ark before he was aware, and it had become too late to interfere either with advice or authority.

The ark, therefore, was taken into the camp, and surely it must have been a sight to inflame into a madness of enthusiasm the minds of the soldiers. Borne amid a long and solemn procession of Priests, the pillar of glory resting upon it, and shining from afar, this symbol of the covenant and the presence of their almighty and irresistible chief, of Jehovah mighty in battle, their victorious leader for 400 years, advanced into the camp. The whole host immediately raised a shout, so that the earth rang again. Proportional was the depression of the spirit of the Philistines. The ark had never come into the field since the miraculous capture of Jericho, whose walls fell down at its presence. The effect, however, was in the result exactly opposite to what Israel hoped. The Philistines were driven to the madness of despair. So animated on each side the armies met. The Israelites were defeated with

the terrible slaughter of thirty thousand men, the ark was taken, and the two sons of Eli were among the slain. God's ways were not their ways. He would not go forth with their hosts. His ark proved to them an empty chest, whose treasure was gone. And he inflicted on them the sin and shame of minishing his glory, and making his name a by-word among the heathen.

Meanwhile Eli remained at Shiloh, trembling for the fate of the ark of God. The godly man felt and knew but too well the extent of the daring presumption with which they had provoked him. Never had he been so tempted of Israel since the days of the wilderness. And as they had fallen there, so may they fall now. He was sitting down, anxiously on the watch, by the way-side, when he heard a great cry in the city. A runaway had brought to Shiloh the dreadful news of the event of the battle. He immediately appeared before Eli with his clothes rent and dust upon his head. He told him of the loss of the battle, and of the death of his two sons, and thus far Eli heard him with patience. For all that he was prepared. But when he added to this the loss of the ark of God, quite overcome he fell back, and breaking his neck (for he was heavy and old) expired.

Doubtless he had been revolving in his mind, the desperate state into which his own weakness and irresolution had brought Israel. His uncorrected sons had spread their corruption far and wide, and rash and godless counsels had prevailed. The thought of the loss of the ark must have occurred to him, and although instantly rejected as something too dreadful for possibility, would recur again and again, and reproach

him as the author of so unspeakable a calamity. What an accumulation then of self-accusation must have come upon him at the moment when the reality was announced, and felled him as by a blow, to the ground. The ark of God was gone from Israel. The visible presence of God had departed from Israel. The Church of God was removed from Israel: yea, from the whole earth. Where was now the covenant with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses? Where was now the promised Redeemer? The golden link of redemption was broken short asunder. God in anger had deserted his people, and for their sins annulled his covenant with his people. Why should he not? It was as conditional as that made to Phinehas, by the annulling of which he himself was now High Priest. Israel was no longer a people of God. He was forsaken by God, and the triumphant idolator was wagging his head in mockery, and asking him, "Where is now thy God?" Of all this inexpressible ruin, spiritual and temporal, to Israel and to the world, he himself was author. He the supreme ruler under God, had winked at unruly godlessness. He the minister of holiness had borne with unholiness. He the guardian of God's honour on earth, had brought it into ridicule before the Gentiles. He the High Priest of God had destroyed the Church of God. The agony of such thoughts, momentary though it was, could not be borne by human heart. It choked him, and he fell. He died at the advanced age of ninety-eight.

There remains an appendage to the account of Eli, an anecdote of striking beauty, brief as it

is. The wife of Phinehas, who was close on the time of her labour, when she heard the dreadful news was suddenly seized with the pangs of childbirth. She lived just long enough to give the child the melancholy name of Ichabod, or, Where-is-the-glory, alluding to the glory of God having departed by the capture of the ark. She too, like her father-in-law, recked little of other loss compared with this. A husband and a brother slain, and a father dead, and all the destitution hence arising, were as dust in the balance when weighed with this. Is the Church of God equally precious now? Will men think temporal losses as nothing compared with this? Will loss of father, and brother, and house, and home, be considered quite subordinate to the overwhelming magnitude of this? And now too, when that Church no longer feeds us with scanty food and coarse fare, no longer amuses us with distant shadows, typified hopes, a promised Redeemer, but when it fills us, beyond the most lively imagination of craving want, with sumptuous unfailing spiritual feasts, and makes us to feel living realities, hopes in substance, a Redeemer given. How many Christians can be thus compared with these Jews? It is to be hoped many, however public carelessness and infidelity may seem to deny the fact. In a wicked and adulterous generation such persons appear not in the foreground: they come not into view until room has been made for them by the conflict and thrusting of the wicked, which involve in their iniquitous contests for wealth and power, the welfare of the visible Church of God, and carry his ark into their battle.

The history of Eli has ever been held out as a

tremendous warning to indulgent parents, and headstrong children. It denounces sorrow, and shame, and ruin both on one and the other, and above all it shows how the glory of the presence of God may depart from a family, and their temporal ruin be but the humble companion to their spiritual. A pious godly father may, like Eli, forget that he is set in a watch-tower over his house, to espy and eject in time every unmeet intruder. He may overlook or but slightly rebuke, through too fond indulgence, the outbursts of passion which proclaim that a wolf has entered into the fold, that one sheep at least has been bitten, and call urgently upon him to lose not a moment in expelling the enemy. He may become, like Eli, the subject and not the ruler of his children: and then the fate of Eli's house will be the fate of his. He will hear Christ and his holy company crying aloud, amid his chambers, "Let us depart hence," he will see that departure, and expire in grief and shame: the last penitent survivor of his house shall exclaim, "where is the glory," and die broken-hearted in the speech; and the pitiless unbelieving world around, freed from the reproof of their former godliness, shall clap their hands and exclaim, "where is now their God?"

And is no warning conveyed to rulers and governors, to whose hands Christ, the great Apostle, has committed the charge of his people? May not their indifference to the moral and spiritual state of subjects which he hath entrusted to them as children to a father, bring down ruin on themselves and the whole nation, and extinguish the light of the Gospel, the presence of Christ's Church among them? Has it

not so done over and over again, from the days of Eli down to within our own memory ? And is not a dreadful example held up to Christ's ministers, the more dreadful in proportion to their rank and influence, of the fatal effects of unwatchfulness over their flocks, of compliance with the headstrong passions which it is their office to curb, of fearing man rather than God ? Yea, let rulers, let ministers, let fathers remember that on them depends the abode of Christ's Church in a nation ; and heavy will be the curse upon them, intolerable the judgment, if one among them shall have good cause for exclaiming, " Where is the glory ? "

## ABSALOM.

B. C. 1023.

THE history of Eli and his sons gives us rather the results of their disobedience than its actual working. We are left to gather the process by which the corruption and consequent punishment of the people was wrought, rather than presented with the view of the several steps of it. The deficiency is abundantly supplied by the history of Absalom, the son of David, king of Israel. Here we have a perfect example of the general truth, that parents are punished by their own children for the sins of which they have been guilty, whether by commission or omission, in their birth or education. And we have here also a complete detail of the manner in which a ruler, by the misrule of his own family, may bring troubles and commotion upon the whole nation. David was a pious man, but had strong passions, and was placed upon the pinnacle of temptation. His life, therefore, has the appearance of bright gleams of holiness, sometimes beaming on every height, and glowing into every depth of it: at other times mixed with dark shadows, and chequering it: at others quite extinguished, and then bursting out again with inexpressible brightness and beauty of gladness. He disregarded the commandment which

Moses in anticipation had given, against the king multiplying wives unto himself; and with the effect predicted by Moses, his heart was turned away. But the disobedience brought its punishment. The most corrupt and corrupting intrigue and quarrel must ever be at work in a family which has more than one mother: she, who has to maintain both herself and children against constant rivalry will teach them but a bad lesson. But David carried his sin still further. Like Ishmael and Esau, whose example he was especially bound to avoid, he took wives from among the idolatrous heathen. The mother of Absalom was a heathen, daughter of the petty king of Geshur in Syria. Thus did David subject the royal line to the danger of idolatry. These were his errors in the very birth of his sons. They were not less in their education. He was, like Eli, too fond and indulgent a father, and sometimes seemed less to fear offending God than angering his children. Thus brought up by their mothers in jealous rivalry of each other, nursed in all the luxury, and flattery, and corrupt practices of a court, and uncurbed by that rein which a father alone can hold, they could not but shortly unveil their privacy to a scandalized world. Occasional sparks, and faint wreaths of smouldering smoke, escaping through the crannies, plainly gave warning to those without of hidden fire, and approaching conflagration. Nor was it slow in bursting out. The melancholy falling-off of David in his treatment of Uriah the Hittite, like a disease coming upon a habit already unsound, brought forth all his former sins into their full efficacy of infliction of vengeance? Incest and the sword ate up his

house, and he himself was driven into exile by his own favourite son. To this foul blot in David's character can be traced the very first incident which brings this unfortunate youth into notice. He, the father of sons, a man of good and holy report, had given to their principles a fatal shock, and almost ruined his paternal authority by that sad example. Ammon, his eldest-born, trod first in his footsteps, and closely followed him (as if the evil one had set him on in mockery and derision) in violent and incestuous treatment of Tamar, his half-sister, and full sister of Absalom. Like another Cain, he brought sin and death in their most obtrusive and frightful shapes into the house. Absalom was justly indignant at this foul injury. He however dissembled his wrath. He felt himself at the time too weak to execute such vengeance as he deemed adequate. But his thirst for the offender's blood grew but more intense, and demanded but deeper draughts, for the delay : and David himself betrayed his duty, and added to the fury rankling in his heart, by not visiting the offence with due punishment. It is said, indeed, that he was very wroth. But how could he have the face to punish in his son a sin of which he himself had so lately been guilty. To deprive him of his birthright, was as much as to say, that he himself deserved to be driven from his throne. Here he felt the sad effects of sin. He dared not punish, where not only the offence, but the peace of his house, and the prosperity of his people loudly demanded it. He was compelled to await in all the humiliating agony of silence, the breaking up of that peace, and to submit to the dreadful prospect of

leaving his throne to so unworthy a successor. His conduct shortly produced its fruits.

Absalom, disappointed of justice in that quarter whither he had a right to look, determined to take the law into his own hands. For two whole years he waited in watching his opportunity, disguising from Ammon every angry feeling with a power of dissimulation far beyond his years. But alas! he and his brothers had been brought up in a school of intriguing hypocrisy at their mother's very apron-strings. Weak characters also (and such he was), like weak animals, possess this and all the other powers of cunning in a degree far superior to that of the strong. It is in a manner their natural weapon of defence.

By this time Absalom's studied quietness had lulled all the parties concerned into the most complete and fatal security. The very perpetrator himself had, perhaps, forgotten the foul deed, nor thought of vengeance here, nor judgment hereafter. The joyous festival which was customary at sheep-shearing, gave him a pretext for inviting the king and all his court. David (as was, no doubt, expected) declined the invitation for himself, and was only prevailed upon by much pressing to allow Ammon, and his other sons to go. Perhaps he had some forebodings if not suspicions. They were fearfully realized. With his father's blessing Absalom went forth upon an undertaking which was to ruin the peace of his house. When the company had grown merry, and been thrown off their guard with wine, some of Absalom's people, instructed for the purpose, rushed in and slew Ammon. Absalom im-

mediately took to flight, and found refuge with his grandfather Talmai, at Geshur. David mourned sorely for his son. The consciousness that his death was traceable to his own misconduct, and that it formed part of its punishment (as God had told him, "the sword shall never depart from thy house"<sup>1</sup>) would render his sorrow more acute. But at the same time his penitent feeling and confession of the merit of his chastisement would abate his blame of Absalom, whose wrongs he had refused to redress, in whose crime he was therefore himself a partaker. As day was added to day, and month to month, his regret for the loss of him who was irrecoverable was mollified, and his paternal longing for him who was absent, grew more strong.

At length, when for nearly three years his yearning had been daily increasing towards Absalom, he was brought over by Joab's artful management to recall him. But he was slow in restoring him to his former favour. For two whole years Absalom dwelt in Jerusalem, and was never suffered to come into the king's presence. Impatient at the length of this disgrace he sent for Joab, to beg him to intercede for him. Joab took no notice of two messages. The petulant and wilful youth then ordered his servants to go and set Joab's barley-field on fire. Joab, thinking it no longer safe to thwart so mischievous and unscrupulous a neighbour, went to him after this, and was prevailed upon to plead for him with the king. Thus when five years had passed since the murder, the youth was restored to all his former favour and countenance.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. xii. 10.

But he could not rest. He had been fondled from his birth, and possessed to perfection all the whimsical unsteadiness, the unsatisfied fickleness, of fondlings. He must ever have some costly toy of amusement. But now he began, in one sense, indeed, to throw away childish things. Brilliant views, extending even to the throne, began to expand before his eyes. He seems now to have been eldest son<sup>1</sup>. His vengeance had at least coincided with his interest. For, although the monarchy was elective, yet so great and so firmly established in other cases were the privileges of the first-born, that the eldest had a decided advantage. His weak and restless mind, having once gazed at this prize, was impatient for enjoyment, and his profligacy was fully prepared to use any means which should offer for fulfilling his wishes. He found ample materials ready at hand, as soon as he began to look around. Israel had been slow in electing David for their king. He had ruled Judah seven years before they offered him their throne. And Judah had ever since been an object of envious jealousy to the other tribes from this proud prerogative of giving a king to the whole nation. David's late conduct must have weakened his influence by its scandal, and a grievous sickness<sup>2</sup>, happening at this time, and preventing him from executing with his former diligence the

<sup>1</sup> We hear no more of Chileab, the second son, 2 Sam. iii. 3., and Adonijah, the fourth, was eldest after the death of Absalom, 1 Kings i. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Of this we have distinct notice in Psalms xxxviii. xxxix. xl. xli., where certain expressions seem to couple it with the machinations of Absalom and his party.

most weighty of his royal duties, would give additional strength to the discontent already growing up. The compactness of his rule began to give way under this double attack. Public virtue, first outraged by shocking examples in high places, and afterwards unsupported by reason of other causes in the same quarter, speedily declined, and the frame of society became out of joint. A neglected and unrepaired building affords abundant and ready materials to him who wishes to build for himself. Such were the means provided for Absalom's enterprize from without. Meanwhile he had within himself a plentiful source of unusual popularity. In beauty of person, which has such immediate and powerful effects in winning the good will of all minds, but more especially of the vulgar, he was remarkable beyond all his fellows. He was a model of perfection. From the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. The murder of his brother, since it was done to avenge a sister's shame, was likely to gain him many more partizans than enemies among the multitude. His youth, full of fire and restlessness, which too often passes with the many for energy and cleverness, could not but be advantageously contrasted with the slow-paced uniformity, and on-coming infirmities of the advanced age of his father. His daring and unprincipled character would be acceptable enough to them, who perpetually confound the profligacy of youth with its generosity, and are never more pleased than when they see their own vices reflected from engaging features, winning manners, and loftiness of station. And such ever was, and ever will be, the numerical

majority of a nation. Under all these advantages, inward and outward, Absalom set himself in earnest to the work of supplanting his father in the throne. He sedulously drew towards him the good will of the people of Israel by numerous little acts of kindness, and minute attentions, which cost nothing to the giver, and always bear value with the receiver. He returned their salutes with studied affability, and as they came from all parts of the land to Jerusalem with their business at the courts of law, he took his post at the gate, caught hold of each as he came up, and when he found him to be an Israelite, affected to enter with great zeal and interest into the justice of his cause, lamented that the king was now so negligent, that he neither heard causes himself, nor appointed deputies to hear them, and then added a wish that he himself were made a judge in the land, so that every man may bring his cause before him, and be righted. At the same time he affected a state and pomp which he well knew would impose upon the multitude, and draw after it hearts which would be in vain solicited by any solid merit. Thus insinuating himself day after day for some years into the popular favour of Israel, and posted in so commanding a position for his purposes as the capital was, he in the end stole away from his father the hearts of the men of Israel.

Every thing was now ready. It shows a sad deficiency of fidelity, both of friends and of the people towards David, when a conspiracy so extensive, and carried on all but before his very face, should grow to ripeness without his knowledge, or even suspicion. A general rising of the men of Israel was planned.

A place of meeting only was wanting, at a sufficient distance from Jerusalem. Hebron was fixed upon : its situation among the mountains removed it sufficiently from observation, and it was near enough to afford the opportunity of surprising the capital. It was also the place where the elders of Israel had elected and anointed David as king, and therefore gave an air of legitimacy to the act which they meant to perform there. Absalom also could plead a plausible excuse for going thither. He requested leave from his father to go thither, and pay a vow which he had vowed to the Lord during his exile at Geshur<sup>1</sup>. Now Hebron was a place of peculiar sanctity, especially suited therefore to such a purpose. There were the tombs of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Sarah. There also was the altar raised by Abraham, which gave it rank among the principal high-places still used for sacrifice. It was also the principal of the priestly cities. And in addition to these reasons, it was natural that Absalom should have fixed on this place, as being that of his birth and early education. David immediately assented, dismissing him with his blessing. He imagined that he was dismissing him on a holy errand, to remember God, and thank him, and not to cast him out of mind, and provoke him by the crime of a parricidal rebellion.

For the second time Absalom, with his father's blessing on his head, rushed forth to work him sorrow. He quitted Jerusalem with a guard of honour of 200 men, who however were not in the

<sup>1</sup> This fact clearly shows that the 40 years cannot be reckoned from his return from exile, did other circumstances allow such reckoning.

secret. Here Achitophel, one of David's own counsellors, joined him at his bidding, and hither Israel flocked to him in great numbers, determined to have a king of their own entire and free election. They increased continually, so that the conspiracy was strong, and ended in his being crowned. According to previous agreement, a trumpet sounded from station to station through the land of Israel, proclaimed to the tribes their new king. Such was David's infatuated security, so little did his friends supply the watchfulness of which his grievous sickness deprived him, that although Hebron was little more than 20 miles from Jerusalem, yet he was surprised by the news of Absalom's usurpation. David had nothing to do but immediately to quit Jerusalem. It was an affecting sight. The whole people went out with him, and the High-priest at the head of the Priests and Levites bearing the ark; and the living city, carrying its God among them, directed its march towards the wilderness. As David ascended Mount Olivet, and thus the holy city and the place of the tabernacle spread itself beneath him, he covered his head, and wept as he went up barefoot. And all the people that were with him covered every man his head, and joined in his lamentation. When he reached the top, and took his last view of the city where God delighted to dwell, he paused to worship, and then pursued his flight to the country beyond Jordan.

Absalom entered Jerusalem in triumph, and opened his pretended reign with a deed of horrible profligacy. The wily and unprincipled Achitophel was the guide of the youth, and, without doubt, was

using him as a convenient instrument for his own deeper purposes. He well knew his fickle temper, and understood how little he had to rely upon in a weak and dissolute youth, who when the novelty of the splendour of royalty had worn off, and its toils and dangers had come on, might be glad to come to terms with his father, and would sacrifice for that purpose without scruple the firmest of his adherents. His safety, therefore, and that of his followers required that the breach should be irreparable. Accordingly, by his wicked counsel, Absalom publicly committed a deed of detestable incest in his father's harem. He was not so successful in his next point of advice, which was equally necessary to his safety, and still more horrible. It was to follow up incest with parricide. He asked for twelve thousand men, and undertook with these to surprise the king and slay him. The indolent and luxurious youth, however equal to the profligacy, was not equal to the energy of such a measure, and therefore more readily gave ear to the advice of Hushai, who was a secret friend and appointed spy of David. He recommended him to wait until all Israel could be assembled, in an overwhelming force, so that they might crush him with numbers. This counsel was artfully mingled with hints of the desperate valour of David, and his men, and of the imminent hazard to which he would put his newly acquired sovereignty by so bold a step. On this plan being preferred, when proffered too from so suspicious a quarter, Achitophel saw that his own paramount influence, on which he so much reckoned, was gone, and that he had fixed on an instrument totally inadequate to so

desperate an enterprize ; he went and hanged himself in despair.

From that moment the doom of Absalom was sealed. He had no one with him capable of conducting so great and difficult an undertaking. According to Hushai's advice all Israel met in arms. But David obtained all that he wanted, which was delay. By the time that the vast host of Israel had crossed the Jordan, and pitched in the land of Gilead, he had grown so strong as to march forward to Mahanaim and give them the meeting. From that town (so celebrated for the host of angels which appeared to Jacob there) his army poured forth in three divisions, and attacked Israel in the wood of Ephraim. This ground gave ample scope to the superior generalship of David. Israel was routed with a dreadful slaughter. Absalom taking to flight among the rest was caught by the hair of his head (which he wore remarkably long) in a bough of the wood, and there suspended. In this helpless situation he was found by Joab in the course of pursuit. Although David had given express instructions to Joab and all his followers to respect the safety of his son, yet he disobeyed, and if not justly in regard to David, certainly with good reason respecting his country. All wise and good men disapproved of David's indulgence towards so unworthy a son, they were wearied with the continual troubles which this reckless and restless youth was ever raising, they dreaded the thoughts of his coming to the throne, or at least of disputing it with a brother. Joab accordingly resolved not to lose this precious opportunity of ridding his country of such a pest. "I may not

tarry thus with thee," he said impatiently to the person who had directed him to Absalom, and reminded him of David's order. So taking three darts in his hand, he thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet hanging alive in the tree.

Thus perished Absalom ; and left behind him a mournful example of the extent to which filial disobedience once begun can go. His punishment followed him even in death. He was buried with the burial of a parricide, being thrown into a pit, and a great heap of stones laid over him in the wood where he fell. He had however erected for himself in his life-time a different sort of monument. Having no son to keep his name in remembrance, he built a pillar near Jerusalem to keep up his memory. It was long after called Absalom's pillar, and they pretend to show it at this day. If then the actual pillar does not survive, his infamy does. It has still its monument of stone, and his memory is daily insulted by every passenger. He little imagined how durable a monument he had erected for himself. It were well for him if this transitory shame were the only shame, the penalty which he suffered the only penalty. Alas there is an everlasting shame, and there is a fire which is ever kindled, and a worm which never dieth. David sorely lamented him. He had been a fondled and favoured son. But the sting of his grief must have been the consciousness that his melancholy end was owing to the want of proper parental strictness. Loudly does he warn parents which can never hope for his excellences, but may avoid his defects. Shall they be visited

less grievously than this man of God? If they neglect to bring up their children steadily in the right way, shall not they in due time turn out such avenging furies as Absalom? Let the world answer with its long black list of examples. Let a thousand faces covered with shame, confusion, and tears, and wrapt in the veil of voluntary obscurity, let a thousand broken fortunes, broken reputations, and broken hearts give the answer.

## SOLOMON.

B. C. 1033—975.

THERE has seldom been offered to mankind, either a more magnificent spectacle for their imagination to feed upon, or a more awful lesson for their understanding to apprehend than the reign of Solomon. Under him in his earlier and godly years the nation of Israel attained its highest pitch of happiness and greatness ; and under him in his later and ungodly years it began to decline towards its fall. There he presents a cheering token of the influence of a wise and good king for good ; and here he exhibits a melancholy proof of the incurable mischief which may be done by a foolish and bad king. There he shone as the glad light set upon a hill to guide the nightly traveller through the plain : and here as the disastrous light set upon a rock to warn the mariner of shipwreck. Thus piety and wisdom, succeeded by ungodliness and all its besotted folly, the one setting forth the other in greater intensity by the contrast, make his character to be an invaluable study to the moralist. Solomon was born in Jerusalem of Bathsheba. He was both conceived and born in David's penitence, and therefore from the first was loved by the Lord. David gave him the name of Solomon, or Peaceable, because of the word of the Lord concern-

ing him, which foretold his birth to David<sup>1</sup>, and gave him that name, to signify that God would give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. God manifested his favour towards the child after his birth by commissioning Nathan the prophet to give him the additional name of Jedidiah, or the Lord's beloved. He grew up in wisdom and godliness, and formed an exception to the general character of the sons of David. He does not come forward in history until the close of his father's reign. At that time, David being old, and laid up with his infirmities, Adonijah, the eldest, since Absalom's death, of the sons born in Hebron, resolved to seize upon the throne. His presumption, like Absalom's, had been fed by his father's overweening fondness, who would never displease him, and his beauty, like Absalom's, had procured him popularity. Joab, the great Captain, and Abiathar, the High Priest, assisted in this disgraceful conspiracy. By means of the faithful Nathan, the Prophet, David was roused to a sense of what was going on. He immediately charged Zadoc the priest, and Nathan the prophet to anoint Solomon at Gihon, in Jerusalem, and proclaim him king by sound of trumpet. Adonijah was obliged to submit, and Solomon was thus elected both into the partnership and succession of David's kingdom. The old king did not very long survive. On his death-bed he gave Solomon various injunctions respecting particularly the way in which he was to deal with certain persons who had troubled his own reign, and were well inclined to disturb that

<sup>1</sup> 1 Chron. xxii. 8.

of his son also. All these Solomon punctually executed on coming to his sole sovereignty. Joab and Abiathar suffered merited punishment. The first was put to death at the altar to which he had fled for refuge. The second was deposed, and Zadoc put into his office. Thus Solomon almost immediately possessed in peace the kingdom which his father David had built up, under God, by such laborious and long struggles. It occupied a country which both to the eye and for food was the most delicious portion of earth. Even twenty centuries of almost continual devastation have not yet been able to trample out but a small portion of its fertility. The Philistine who had so lately bearded his predecessors was humble and peaceable. The Edomite, the Moabite, the Ammonite, those names of former terror, now reposed quietly under his dominion, which extended from Gaza, on the Egyptian border, to Thapsacus on the Euphrates, and formed the predominant monarchy of Western Asia. The nation had found after its long wanderings and reverses a settled resting-place, and dwelt safely, every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree, from Dan to Beersheba. Israel had now full leisure given him to look forward from this accomplishment of God's temporal promises to the fulfilment of his spiritual. Alas! both king and people soon forgot the giver in the abundance of his gifts, and while the ox knew his owner, and the ass his master's crib, Israel would not know, God's people would not consider.

An ominous speck or two discloses itself at the commencement of his reign. He took a wife from the idolatrous house of Pharaoh. She, however,

might have become a convert to the true faith. King and people also still violated the law of Moses<sup>1</sup> by sacrificing on high places : since God had limited his presence to the tabernacle, this was a presumptuous tempting of him. But man has a perverse love for any thing novel and forbidden in preference to what is established and bidden ; and whenever he feels a more than ordinary excitement, or thinks to do God a more than ordinary service, nothing ordinary, be it even ordained by God himself, will content him. Some excuse may be found for this unlawfulness at the present time from the separation of the ark and its tabernacle. The former was on Mount Sion, whither David had brought it, the latter, with all its holy furniture, was at Gibeon, which was the principal high-place<sup>2</sup>. Thus there was no place of worship exactly corresponding to that which Moses had commanded to be the only one. It was at Gibeon that Solomon, after having offered a splendid sacrifice of a thousand burnt offerings, was vouchsafed a divine vision. The Lord appeared to him in a dream at night, and said, " Ask what I shall give thee." Solomon, expressing a deep sense of the responsibility of his station, requested understanding to rule the people committed to his charge. Such was the wise and manly answer made by a youth of eighteen. On thinking of what almost all youths in his circumstances, with his strong passions, his love of magnificence, his possession of the proudest throne in Western Asia, would ask, we cannot but be struck with admiration of his modesty and wisdom, and of

<sup>1</sup> Levit. xvii. 3, 4.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Chron. xxi. 29.

that diffidence in himself which turned him in confidence to God. He was not one of those feeble luxurious youths who have looked upon empire merely as the irresponsible and unlimited enjoyment of their lusts, on the government of others as the blest occasion of throwing off the government of themselves, on the supremacy of their will over fellow man as the subjection of it to their own passions. He took upon himself the royal power as God's vicegerent upon earth, as his appointed instrument of blessedness to the people whom he had chosen. He was to rule as eldest brother of a family during his father's absence, and to render an account of his charge on his return. He was the predecessor of one greater still, and prefigured him who was to gather all earth under his dominion. He was as it were riding in a glorious procession, which his orderly conduct would bring uniformly towards its end. But if he was rampant, and recklessly broke the ranks around him, he would throw the whole into confusion, and delay its progress towards the end. He was but a harbinger in that procession, and wore the livery of that Heavenly Sovereign, who, as in a triumph, closed up the rear. Thus he was guided by heavenly principles, which alone can triumph in the conflict which a monarch has to undergo. They are like the soul of man, which cannot be affected by the elements of this world, but defies their most violent assault. They are like the wind which throws down palaces, but is itself unassailable. While worldly principles, like the body of man, yield before the assault of kindred elements, break up, and waste away by being exposed to stronger and more corrupt principles of

the same world. Solomon proved himself here filled indeed with that spirit which became him who had been anointed by God's prophet and priest; and the inward grace bestowed in that outward unction had been put to such good use that it earned more grace, and the wisdom shown in this petition obtained the gift of more wisdom. God gave him "a wise and understanding heart; so that there was none like him before him, neither after him should any arise like unto him." God also proved in him the rule which his blessed Son afterwards laid down, when he commanded us to seek first the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness, and then all earthly blessings shall be added to it. Because Solomon had asked this heavenly gift only, and mentioned none earthly, God gave him the earthly also. "I have also given thee (he says) that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days<sup>1</sup>."

From the tabernacle at Gibeon, Solomon returned to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, which was followed by a feast to all his servants. Thus he consecrated the threshold of his reign, and under these happy auspices commenced his course. He made God the beginning, happy if he had made him also the end of all his doings. Gloriously indeed did he set out. The neighbouring princes sent their congratulations, and renewed with

him the friendship which they had made with his father. Among them was one who did him essential service in the grand work of his reign. This was Hiram, king of Tyre, a man of a truly princely spirit. The position of his kingdom gave him command of the forests of Lebanon, and the high pitch of civilization, to which a long and successful commerce had advanced his people, had given birth to and nursed up cunning artificers of all the requisites of luxury and magnificence. Intent from the first upon his great work of building a house to God, he made a league with him, and covenanted for supplying his maritime territory with corn, on the terms of permission to cut down cedars on Lebanon, and of a supply of workmen.

This great work, such as never fell to human hands before, nor has since, had been contemplated by his father David. He had even made extensive preparations, and fixed the site on Mount Moriah, already sacred from Abraham's offering of his son, but now especially blest with God's presence, who there answered him at the threshing-floor of Ornan, the Jebusite, when he sacrificed, and the plague was stayed<sup>1</sup>. God, however, prevented his farther proceeding, telling him that he should not build a house unto his name, because he had shed much blood upon the earth in his sight. But that he would give him a son, who should be a man of peace, and that he should build the house to his name. A short time before his death, David had accumulated abundance of materials, stones, and iron, and brass, and

<sup>1</sup> 1 Chron. xxi. 28.

timber, for the work, and solemnly put them into the hands of Solomon, giving him a pattern also of the building, and even of the vessels and instruments of service. He had also for this purpose arranged the course of the ministry of the priests and Levites. One of the last acts of his reign was the making over of all these to Solomon in a solemn assembly of all Israel, in which he bade him be strong and of good courage to build the house which the Lord had chosen him to build for his sanctuary: to fear not, nor be dismayed: for that the Lord God, even the God of David, would be with him, nor fail him, nor forsake him, until he had finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord<sup>1</sup>. But David's provision, splendid as it was, came very far below the estimate of Solomon. No prince had loftier notions of magnificence than he. He was inspired with them as a gift for this sacred purpose. Lebanon was again to yield her tribute of cedars, and Hiram again to furnish artificers. For three years these additional preparations went on. Thirty thousand men, by courses of ten thousand for the month, were employed in felling timber in Lebanon, fourscore thousand were hewing stone in the mountains, and three-score and ten thousand were required for carrying burdens. Over all was a numerous staff of inspectors, amounting to 3,300. What a continual stir and din must have prevailed through the land, how frequent and how tumultuous must have been the bursts of feeling of saintly men, when they daily saw before them, along the lengthened road through the cities

<sup>1</sup> 1 Chron. xxviii. 20.

of Israel, from north to south, the unwearied procession of materials on their way to compose the house of the living God, where he was to dwell among them, and protect them with the glory of his presence. The imagination grows bewildered among the crowd of lively pictures which rises up before it on every side. It sees old and young running from their doors at the sound of the wheels to hold up their hands and bless the work, the old praying to see the day of accomplishment, the young listening to their accounts of God's merciful dealings and promises, now so vividly painted to their minds, as these portions of his holy residence rolled by. It sees the glad procession which escorted the laden wains through every town with song and dance, and timbrel and harp. It enters into the overflowing of Solomon's heart, when he awoke each morning to the rolling of wheels, the creak and groaning of burdens and the cry of drivers, and poured out his spirit at his matins amid this strange accompaniment, this noisy anthem to God's glory. Oh! had he been but as zealous in preparing the materials of God's everlasting temple in his heart. How easy is it, in comparison, to honour God by outward and earthly magnificence of ornament? How little can be reckoned on any emotions of the heart on such occasions? They are easily excited: they easily depart. Their food comes from without, and that ceasing, they cease also. They begin in the flesh, and there too often end. They lull into a vain security, and delude by being mistaken for more heavenly affections. The zeal for God's glory is too often but the vanity of the heart, and the

satisfaction of doing him a splendid service overcomes the humiliation of the consciousness of sin, or is but the enjoyment of a set off against the tale of previous delinquency. How many founders have there been of buildings to God's honour and glory, who with all their toil and expence in wood and stone found it but unprofitable compared with the labour of building that only temple which God will accept as his dwelling-place, the temple of the pure heart. Earthly buildings have too often been the substitutes for heavenly buildings, and the sight of towers and pinnacles soaring in the sky to God's honour, and raised by their hands, has diverted their thoughts from that inner sanctuary which alone is precious in God's eyes, of that temple where indeed neither axe nor hammer is heard, and where a contrite spirit is the sacrifice.

All things at length had been prepared, and, in the second month of the fourth year of his reign, Solomon began the building. In the eighth month of the eleventh year he finished it. As far as can be judged from description, the materials were more precious than the workmanship. But neither one nor the other were of any value as compared with its precious destination. Here God promised to dwell among the children of Israel, and not to forsake his people. Many and deep must have been his reflections upon the fate of the house which he was building. It depended not on the common and outward accidents of time and weather, but on the state of the inner man. It would fall when it ceased to have a model in the hearts of the king and people. An unfinished building ever excites

solemn ideas, even in the most sanguine, by its ominous resemblance to a ruin. As therefore he laid stone by stone, and course upon course, and cemented them together, he must have had thrust before his eyes the day of God's vengeance, when in a few hours the spoiler may undo his work of years. A wholesome awe must have continually rebuked his rising vanity, and chastened his joy. Short and frequent ejaculations must have burst from his lips, as he walked amid the throng of workmen, the mazy heaps of materials, and inspected the rising pile, and many and fervent must have been the prayers of his secret chamber, as he opened and closed each day. He understood better than any one else the final object, the remote tendency of all this labour. He knew that these were sensible means towards a spiritual end : that God, in commanding this house to be built, was graciously complying with the gross notions of man, for that the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands. He acknowledged that himself and his people were in a spiritual childhood, and as with children the rudest resemblance in their plaything will qualify to stand for its original, so was it with them. This very house, magnificent and glorious as it was, coarsely prefigured, with its stones and timber, some heavenly original. Perhaps his glimpses scarcely reached to that temple of lively flesh, in which the glory of the Lord should dwell upon earth in the latter days. But he knew that according to the promise made to Abraham, the whole earth should be filled with his spiritual progeny, for whom no temple could serve, save that vast house in which heaven is God's throne

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and earth his footstool: that God would then no longer shut up his glory in a secret chamber, but reveal it to the whole world. Alas! the loss of this his temple would be the gain of the world. Never since the days of Noah, has builder had such a crowd of possessing thought pressed upon his mind; and never has been one more capable of giving it room and entertainment. A smile of ridicule instantly arises at the mention of the holiest Christian builder of the proudest Christian temple. Such a builder is an unnecessary trifler in comparison, his building an unmeaning show.

The furnishing of the house with its altars and holy vessels, next took up his attention. For this purpose he invited from Tyre a skilful workman in metal of the name of Hiram. The more sacred part of the furniture was cast in pure gold. The rest (and some were of enormous size) were cast in brass. All having at length been completed, the day was appointed for its solemn dedication.

The time was chosen with singular happiness. It was the seventh month, answering nearly to our September. It afforded for the purpose an interval of leisure to the people, the harvest being over, and the vintage not come. In the ecclesiastical calendar it was festive beyond all others. Being the Sabbatical month it opened with the spirit-stirring feast of trumpets<sup>1</sup>, whose loud strains commemorated the creation of the world. On the tenth<sup>2</sup> was the great day of national atonement: the nation, therefore, came clean and clad as it were in the white robes of

<sup>1</sup> Levit. xxiii. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 27.

righteousness and innocence for the ceremony. On the fifteenth was the feast of Tabernacles<sup>1</sup>, when they commemorated by dwelling in booths and tents their long sojourn under tents before they found a resting-place in the land. It was on this festival, which lasted seven days, that Solomon most appropriately fixed for relieving the ark of God from its long wanderings under the tabernacle, and carrying it up into the temple as its final resting-place. When the day came, the king and all his people, which could not be counted for number, met and sacrificed before the ark, and then preceded it in solemn procession, as it moved on the shoulders of the Priests, accompanied by the whole train of Priests and Levites, sanctified for the ceremony. Thus it was carried from Mount Sion to Mount Moriah, and there lodged in the holy of holies of the temple, amid the sound of cymbals, and psalteries and harps, and of a hundred and twenty trumpets, while the voices of the singers, who stood at the east end of the altar, clad in white, rose amid the concert, and sang, "Praise the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever." At this moment, and as the Priests coming forth from the holy of holies, testified that the Lord had taken up his resting-place, the cloud of the glory of the Lord filled the whole house, so that the Priests could not see to minister for its dazzling brightness. The king then rose and addressed and blest the people, and taking his station on a brazen scaffold, so as to be seen by the whole congregation, and spreading forth his hands, he uttered a solemn prayer of de-

<sup>1</sup> Levit. xxiii. 39.

dication, in which he implored God's present assistance on every occasion of the use of this house. It is a noble and affecting prayer, which even at this day cannot be read without lively emotion. What must have been its effect amid assembled Israel, with the visible glory of the Lord, shining and bickering around them, and when at its conclusion fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices? The whole congregation bowed with their faces to the ground, and worshipped, saying, "Praise the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever." A second splendid sacrifice, amid song and music, closed this ceremony; and on the twenty-third day, when the feast of tabernacles was over, the people returned to their homes. When all had been concluded, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a vision of the night, and answered his prayer of dedication by a promise of presence and protection, comforting him and his people with blessings, and warning them with threats.

Never did such an accumulation of solid glory come upon mortal man as upon Solomon, in this high privilege of builder of God's house. On this occasion he centered in himself that threefold character which never came together again, until for the last time it united and received its anti-typical accomplishment in the person of the Son of God. He was Priest, not in the mechanical part of sacrifice, which was confined by the law of Moses to the sons of Aaron, but as builder of his house and altars to God, and by their dedication through the spiritual sacrifice of prayer. He was prophet as favoured with especial communication from God on the fate of that house,

he ~~Is~~ the house which he built was prophetic of hap~~e~~ temple of the human body in which God's glory to ~~hd~~ hereafter dwell, when the Redeemer stood ~~hn~~ on the earth. On this occasion too he prefigured ~~he~~ the holy and apostolic builders of the Christian ~~urch~~ church, laying his foundation on the rock of Moriah, ~~ten~~ as they on the rock of Christ. He stands out ~~a~~ prominent figure in the retrospect of God's Church, reflecting, as one of his types, the effulgence of glory which pours down through the long vista from the heavenly original. This his deed is one of the chief and critical points of its history, by which it is divided into stages, each more teeming with accomplishment towards the end than the last. He was now but in his twenty-fourth year, and had length of days and of glory before him, not, as other men, from reasonable expectation, but from the express promise of God, if only he would walk in his ways. The beginning of this course shows how happy and glorious might have been its end.

His prosperity grew to an amazing pitch. Not only was Jerusalem adorned with his palaces, but the land was decked with fair cities. Two of these were stationed for the sake of commerce, and were the gates through which riches flowed into the land, so that silver was as plentiful as stones in Jerusalem. One was in the north, Tadmor, in the wilderness which connected the Euphrates with the Mediterranean sea, and by upwards of a thousand years of prosperity bore testimony to Solomon's discernment in fixing its site. Alas! its splendid ruins at this day, preach to the traveller from Solomon's own text, "All is vanity." The other was in the south, Ezion-geber,

on the Red Sea, which connected the Mediterranean with the Indian Sea. Thus Solomon made the country the cistern into which flowed full and constant streams of wealth, at once from northern, from central, and from Southern Asia. From the latter port his navies explored the distant regions of silver and gold, and spices. It has been the only period (and brief indeed was this) in which the Holy Land has felt the advantages of its peculiarly happy situation; for uniting the commerce of the east and of the west. One military exploit only is recorded of this man of peace, the taking of Hamath-zobah. The rest of his reign, until towards its close, was entirely peaceful. It was, however, much indebted for this to his being in constant preparation for war. One class of his forces clearly shows the extent of his dominion. Moses in his anticipatory rules for the king, prohibits him from "multiplying horses to himself<sup>1</sup>." Yet Solomon maintained so many as 12,000. His empire, now extended into the flats of Assyria, seemed to require such a body. The splendour and renown of Solomon's kingdom, and his reputation for wisdom and magnificence attracted strangers from all quarters, and the queen of Sheba came from the remote and unexplored regions of the south<sup>2</sup> to witness the truth of the extraordinary reports which had reached her. He was now in all that glory<sup>3</sup> to which Israel ever after so fondly looked back, and never saw return, which he ambitiously looked forward to in his Messiah, and dazzled by its false glare, could not discern the spiritual glory in which

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xvii. 16.<sup>2</sup> Matt. xii. 42.<sup>3</sup> Ib. vi. 29.

he me. Had Solomon now died he had been happy : he had departed at peace with God, and left to posterity a name bright among the brightest. We have henceforward the sad tale to tell of his decline and fall.

It is singular that three cardinal statutes of those prescribed to the king by Moses, were violated by Solomon. He was not to multiply silver and gold to himself, nor to multiply horses to himself, nor to multiply wives to himself. The two first perhaps were not violated in spirit. God himself promised him riches. The law of Moses seems to have had reference to the king scraping together and laying up money for the selfish purposes of arbitrary power. But Solomon's wealth, in the days of his glory, was his share as head of a wealthy nation, and not concentrated from scanty coffers. For his maintaining such a body of horse we have already seen what excuse may be made. But is it sufficient, even supposing that the service of this force was appointed beyond the limits of the tribes ? Would it not have been more reasonable to throw himself, in strict obedience to this law, on the hands of God, with the assurance that what he had given, he would also help him to keep ? Thus would have been avoided the stumbling-block of even an apparent breach of law. The breach of this commandment might have imperceptibly led to that of the next. One precept broken on ever so good grounds, if knowingly and wilfully broken, weakens the power of conscience, takes away from grace, and leaves the offender unarmed against the temptation of breaking another, which is still more peremptory, on slighter grounds,

and with less compunction. The third precept had indeed been violated by David. But this only renders Solomon's offence less excusable. He had seen the severe penalty of its breach in the miserable divisions of his family. He himself had tasted its effects in having a struggle for the throne. A man of his admirable wisdom, and intimate knowledge of the human heart was bound to reject such an example, even had it not been unlawful by statute. Both love of God, and charity to man should have made it unlawful on principle. But instead of doing thus, he went far beyond David, not only in the numerousness of his harem; but also in following the hateful example of former outcasts from God's Church, of Ishmael and Esau, in taking to himself wives from among the idolatrous nations, from the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites. From this moment Solomon fell, and instead of a holy, wise, and just king, we have now before us an ungodly, infatuated, oppressive despot. He yielded now to the grossest of human appetites, to that which swallows up and extinguishes as in a furious whirlpool all intellectual, all moral, all spiritual good. The words of the violated precept of Moses were too truly fulfilled. His wives turned away his heart. What a shameful, what an alarming fall is here! This very builder of the temple of Jehovah built temples to the gods of his idolatrous wives, to Chemosh, the abomination of the Moabites, and to Moloch, the abomination of the Ammonites. This man, who with such fervent prayer had dedicated his house to the living God, could pronounce the abominable names and titles of false gods. He

who had seen the visible glory of the Lord descend and consecrate his house, could endure to raise altars to the demons of darkness. He who had raised on Mount Moriah the temple of the Lord God of Hosts of Israel could erect on the rival and confronting height of Mount Olivet, temples to the most filthy of the filthy gods of the heathen. This man who publicly before the face of all Israel, and for himself and successors for ever, had made a covenant with God, to walk in his ways, and serve and obey him, who knew, beyond all other men, the extent and effects of his ingratitude, and the frightful penalty of disobedience, he could thus recklessly, heartlessly, audaciously turn away from him, and defy his displeasure. He forgot how he had been preferred to elder brothers, for the very purpose of maintaining the honour and glory of God. Yet God did not at once cast him away. He gave him a signal example of long-suffering and a proof of the truth of the burden of that holy song with which he had dedicated the temple "his mercy endureth for ever." He appeared to him yet a third time, and although with a very different charge, with a threat instead of a blessing, yet the appearance was a sign of mercy. He had not given him up entirely to follow his own ways, he would still call him to repentance ; and repentance, in this as in many other similar recorded cases, might have averted the judgment which was passed against him. After rebuking him for his disobedience, God threatened to rend his kingdom from him and give it to his servant. But he lightened the burden of this punishment by delaying it until the days of his son, and reducing its severity to

the separation of ten tribes, and not of the whole people. Yet the reason assigned for this alleviation was such as should have cut to the heart any one but the most selfish and insensible profligate. The sentence was thus mitigated for his father David's sake. So completely had Solomon cancelled with God all remembrance of former services. He says not for the sake of thy former merits, but of those of thy father. He had completely exhausted his own stock, and, as profligates so often are, was compelled to live upon his father. To such a miserable condition was reduced the chosen builder of the house of God. He was pronounced degenerate from his father, and apostate from himself.

His glory was now departing fast from him, and the splendid fabric of power which his father had reared, and himself had upheld with so much fame and honour, began to crumble into dust. The Edomite whom his father had subdued began to be restless, and disturbed the quiet of the close of his reign, under Hadad one of the ancient royal seed of Edom. This commotion in the south was answered by another in the north, where Rezin wrested Damascus from his empire. Hence the neighbourhood of his two great commercial cities, Tadmor and Ezion-geber, became disturbed and insecure, and the channels of wealth into his kingdom were blocked up. His people grew impoverished and were no longer able to support his extravagance. His dominion became a yoke and a grievous yoke. They had not murmured as long as they contributed to a magnificence, honourable to the nation, from well-filled coffers. But now they were grievously

and tyrannically taxed to support dalliance, debauchery, and idolatry, from curtailed resources. Discontents broke out, and the signal of the waning glory of the house of David was given by the prophet Ahijah, who, in obedience to God's command, anointed Jeroboam as king over the ten tribes which were to revolt from his son.

The last recorded act of Solomon is his attempt to kill Jeroboam. Thus he ended with a wilful opposition to God's appointment. So little did he reckon of God's last warning to him. So utterly had he sunk to the reprobate mind of voluptuousness. So destructive is lust; it ruins both heart and head; it hardens one and perverts the other; it extinguishes shame, it sears the feeling of affection, and love, and gratitude, it destroys all sensibility to holiness, it darkens the understanding with utter infatuation upon all things of good report in earth and in heaven, and enlightens it only with the infernal lightening of cold, selfish calculation in the matters of sensual gratification. There is no hint in Scripture that Solomon ever repented of his sins. Indeed, the narrative implies rather the reverse. Seldom, or rather never, has a hoary profligate awakened to repentance. It is a moral impossibility, it is a spiritual improbability. The man who has once entertained the word of life, and then abandoned it, is in a more hopeless situation than he who never recked of it at all. The inert seed may at some time or other shoot up; but the eradicated plant can never thrive again. After a reign of forty years of glory, such as the best of his successors could never reach to, and of shame, such as the worst scarcely sank to, Solomon was gathered to his fa-

thers. God's unappeased displeasure against him is declared by the age at which he died. He promised him length of days on condition of obedience, and he died at the comparatively early age of 59. The kingdom which he had received from his father, improving and united, he left to his son, declining and distracted. God was sufficiently merciful in delaying to the day of his successor the ruin which his iniquities had brought upon his country. Alas! that successor found too clearly that the sins of their fathers are visited upon their children. Melancholy, indeed, is the review of the life of Solomon. We are grieved and miserably disappointed as in one of those days of spring, when we have awakened to a warm bright sun, with life and light in joyous sound and motion all around us; but by noon the sun is hidden in clouds of darkness, and rain and wind are howling. With intellectual vigour superior to that of his father David, he had passions equally strong, with less moral firmness to control them. He had not been bred up in the hardy school of adversity, nor had peril and the sword taught him either command over himself, or confidence in God. He sank therefore to the lowest depth of his father's sins, but never soared up to the height of his holiness. David's worst sins were momentary surprises compared with his. His were sins of wilful systematic indulgence; and, like a true voluptuary he forgot his best friend, he forgot all his benefits, he forgot his plighted covenant. Here is a dreadful apostasy; here is a man once prodigally decked out in the most precious gifts of God's Holy Spirit, and then utterly stripped of them by his own act: one

who had tasted (yea, and given to taste) the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, who fell away, and was not renewed again unto repentance<sup>1</sup>.

The works of Solomon, some of which compose a portion of the word of God in his Church, must have been composed before he fell into this lamentable state, the effect of which is to enervate the mind, to indispose it to any thing serious, and to break down all its vigorous thought and masculine sense. Alas, for wisdom ! of how little avail is its earthly dross, when the heavenly spirit is fled. When Solomon had once lost the fear of God, which he himself lays down as the rudiment of wisdom, what was all that remained but folly, the folly of those men, who professing themselves to be wise, become fools<sup>2</sup>. Like those bodies which lose all their transparency, when some pervading quality is gone, and intercept light instead of transmitting it ; such is wisdom deprived of the Spirit ; it darkens instead of enlightening the mind. It introduces man to the powers of darkness, and excludes him from the powers of light. It is potent only for mischief, only to misguide and destroy : it is a lie, as the father of it is a liar. Real wisdom can never be maintained without continual communication with the blessed fountain of all wisdom, and truth cannot abide with him who has forsaken the God of truth.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. vi. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. i. 22

## ELIJAH.

B. C. 896.

OF all the prophets under the old dispensation, Elijah, of Thisbe, in Galilee, is most remarkable. Samuel, indeed, stands first in order of time<sup>1</sup>, Isaiah has gained the title of the Evangelical Prophet, and Daniel could fix the very period of the beginning and end of the kingdom of heaven upon earth. But Elijah was not only a prophet, but also a prophecy. He is personally concerned with both covenants. He typified the forerunner of that King, and the last strain of the last prophet promised to send Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. He even personally made his reappearance in the latter days. In the awfully magnificent scene of the transfiguration of our Lord on the Mount, he is seen attending upon him in his glory, the representative of the prophetic, as Moses was of the legal part of the old covenant. On this account his history is among the most important portions of the narrative of the Old Testament. The circumstances which first bring him before us, tell a sad tale of the degeneracy of Israel. The family of the schismatical Jeroboam, which had been cut off by God's express declaration, was succeeded by one which, undeterred by the awful warning, gave

<sup>1</sup> See Acts iii. 24.; the Books of Samuel are first in the prophetic series of the Jewish canon.

itself up to the aggravated sin of idolatry. This was introduced, as usual, by intermarriage with the heathen. Ahab, the most weak and wicked of the Israelitish kings, and second of this dynasty, married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians. Her husband immediately gave himself up to all the abominable superstitions of her nation. But the artful and ambitious woman was not content with this token of her influence. She saw her advantage in the general dissemination of these impieties. It gave her a party in the kingdom, which, supported as it was by this reason from without, bade defiance to the opposition of the faithful servants of God. Nor was it difficult to substitute her religion in place of the corrupt worship of Jehovah. When images are once introduced as objects of adoration, it little matters whom they represent; and it was easy for men, if scruples arose, to be persuaded that Baal and his fellows were no other than their own Jehovah, under peculiar attributes. When they had once degraded his glory to the likeness of a calf that eateth hay, it was but a short step to give him another name and form. The apostasy was soon general. Baal had a temple and altar at Samaria, the worship of Astarte was established, and both deities were furnished each with a long train of about 400 priests. It was amid such impieties that God interfered, and commanded Elijah to go before Ahab, and denounce a drought upon the land. The manner in which this communication was received is a striking example of degeneracy. Saul had submissively listened to Samuel, and David to Nathan, notwithstanding the unwelcome-ness of their message. But Ahab immediately

sought the life of his rebuker, and began a cruel and general persecution of the prophets of God. This class of men was maintained by God in constant succession among his people, in order to keep alive in them that spirituality, to which their law, taken by itself, was unfavourable. They were to maintain those grand truths and doctrines which the law presumed upon, or typified rather than expressed. They were God's peculiar servants and messengers, and, after the establishment of kingly power, were more than ever necessary to remind both king and people of the only true King and real source of all power and might. Good kings received them with the utmost submission, while they were odious above all men to a wicked government. It saw in these his ministers a continual rebuke. When it would willingly put God out of sight, these men brought, as it were, his eyes upon it. They were God's spies upon it. They made it feel that there were bosoms full of purity and wisdom hourly arraigning it, and pleading against it before the throne of God, and it felt an awe which it would not avow, while the sense of it was intolerable. They were, therefore, ever the first to suffer in national calamities. Such, as St. Peter says, ever commence with the house of God<sup>1</sup>. For wicked measures necessarily create their determined, because conscientious, opposition, and this opposition is charged with factious obstinacy from the fewness of its maintainers. Alas! the faithful servants of God, and only possessors of truth and wisdom, ever have been, and ever will be, a few. Of course Jezebel was

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter iv. 17.

delighted to obtain any ground upon which to assail them, and it was not difficult to charge upon them, as represented in Elijah their head, all the miseries of the famine which was so sorely vexing the land. Elijah escaped by God's special protection, who commanded him in the first instance to go and hide himself in the glen of the Cherith, which was one of the tributaries of the Jordan. Here he was miraculously sustained until the drought, which himself had pronounced, dried up the brook. God then sent him to Sarepta, a Phœnician town, and here among the heathen he exhibited those miraculous works, which were withheld from the apostasy of the people of God<sup>1</sup>. A poor widow obtained what would have been denied to kings. He raised her son from the dead, and was thus a forerunner of Him that should raise Lazarus, and the son of the widow of Nain, and shall come again in glory to raise the dead at the last day.

Three years had thus passed away, when Elijah was commanded to go and show himself to Ahab. He immediately obeyed. On his way he met Obadiah the steward of the king's household. From him he learned the sad tidings of the destruction of all his brethren of prophecy, who had remained in the land, and whom Obadiah had made a vain attempt to save by hiding a hundred of them, by fifty, in a cave, and supporting them on bread and water. So that he, even he only, remained a prophet of the Lord. Had another remained, every human means of escape had been precluded by the strict search which

<sup>1</sup> Luke iv. 24, &c.

Ahab was now making through the land for water. Obadiah was greatly alarmed at the appearance of Elijah, whose hiding-place the king had been endeavouring by every possible means to discover, and still farther, for his own safety, when Elijah bade him go and announce his arrival to Ahab. He was, however, prevailed upon, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. The weak king, probably, had not Jezebel immediately at his side to incite and support him. Perhaps, therefore, his better inclinations prevailed, while the dignified and confident air of the minister of God over-awed him. He feared to lay hands upon him, and was content to reproach him with the cause of the national affliction. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" he asked. The prophet boldly replied, "I have not troubled Israel: but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim." Thus the anointed of God feared not to rebuke the anointed of man. He retorted his false charge with one of galling truth. He raised his voice, as a messenger of God against iniquity, although enthroned in high places. Assured of the help of his God, he feared not the wrath of the slayer of his brethren the prophets. He even gave through him a challenge to the whole body of false prophets, to meet him at Mount Carmel in the face of all Israel. Ahab accepted it for them, and summoned the crowd of the prophets of Baal, which were 450, and the crowd of the prophets of Ashera, which were 400, to meet Elijah in the face of all Israel at Mount Carmel.

It was agreed that each party should then and there

offer sacrifice to their gods, and that that God which answered by fire should be acknowledged as the true God. What would render the event more striking, if it fell in Elijah's favour, was the fact of his being doubly disqualified for thus offering sacrifice. He was not a priest, and the spot was not the temple. The spectacle was sufficient to stir every heart that could feel in Israel. There they saw before them the prophet of the true and only God, whom they had been hunting down for more than three years, standing all alone, solitary survivor of his persecuted brethren, brought as it were to his trial without an advocate, without a friend, and this very trial granted him as a favour. He came before them weary and worn, the despised minister of an abandoned God. Opposed to him, and arrayed in costly vesture, accompanied with all the pomp and circumstance that could win the eye and ear, and allure the imagination, and which idolatry knows so well how to employ, with robes, and fillets, and standards, and instruments of music, stood the prophets of Baal, to the imposing number of 400, all guests of the queen's table. But the solitary old man was not to be dismayed at the sight of such fearful odds. He kept up his high and gallant bearing amid his seeming helplessness, and bold in the help and cause of his God, recked neither of prophets nor of people. One who had to plead a cause less sacred and uncompromising, would have endeavoured to win the favourable attention of these parties. He, on the contrary, rebuked them with a bold and taunting severity, and with all the air of a superior. Of the people he indignantly asked, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the

Lord be God, follow him ; but if Baal, follow him." The people answered him not a word. Then with a confident air, which must have carried the minds of many with him, and deepening his rebuke, he said in bitter allusion to their persecution of the servants of the true God, and pampering of those of the false, " I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord. But Baal's prophets are 450 men." He then proposed the manner of trial, to which the people assented. He yielded precedence to the prophets of Baal, repeating as a reason the remark, " for ye are many." Their number gave them, indeed, great advantages. It favoured the fraudulent introduction of fire, and their finding no means of doing this, shows how strictly they must have been watched. There were still enough of eyes in Israel to keep watch on the cause of their Lord. And now began the agonies of these impostors. They were lost if they could not divert the attention of the people, and protract the time in order to gain an opportunity of stealing the fire. And such of them as really believed in the power of Baal soon began to yield to most distressing doubt. At the hour of morning sacrifice (about nine) the trial began. The bullock was laid upon the altar, and they commenced their invocation of " O Baal, hear us." Yet no voice answered them. They then frantically leaped upon the altar, and yet noon came, and Baal was silent and powerless. Then it was that in the face of assembled Israel Elijah mocked them. " Cry aloud," said he, " for he is a god. Either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened." They continued their inef-

fectual cries, and went through all their abominable superstitions, cutting themselves with knives and lances. At last their allotted time was run out. The hour of evening sacrifice arrived, and there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. At this hour, which was the third after noon, Elijah's turn came. He called the people close around him, so that they may be certified against the suspicion of any fraudulent attempt. And to make assurance more sure, he dug a ditch all around his altar (which he repaired out of a ruined one<sup>1</sup>, as if typifying his restoration of the true worship), and poured water three times on the victim, and on the wood, until it ran about the altar and filled the ditch. He then, in ears lately unused to sounds so holy, put up a prayer to the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, beseeching him to show himself to be the Lord, and to turn the hearts of the people. The prayer was no sooner finished than the fire of the Lord fell, and not only consumed the sacrifice, and wood, and stones, and dust, but even licked up the water that was in the trench. The people immediately fell on their faces, and burst into one cry of, "the Lord, he is the God, the Lord, he is the God." Thus were the hearts of the people once again turned to their God, the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. The prophets of Baal were readily surrendered by their former followers to the disposal of Elijah. Being awakened from their delusion, they could regard them with no other feelings than those of indignation and contempt. Nor

<sup>1</sup> See 1 Kings xix. 14.

could he have any doubts, as to the manner of disposing of them. They had dared to officiate in a worship to strange gods among God's people, in a land and a nation of which the Lord God was peculiarly king. They were guilty, therefore, of idolatry and treason, and this was no time for dispensing with the laws against them. It was the very critical moment for putting them into marked execution. The whole body of false prophets, therefore, was brought down to the brook Kishon, and there put to death.

This transaction is one of the most memorable in the history of the ancient Church, whether we regard its consequences, its example, or the particular character which Elijah sustained in it. Viewing it in this last direction, we see Elijah especially prefiguring the forerunner of the Messiah, who proclaimed repentance and remission of sins. Here he fulfilled that high duty in which the angel Gabriel announced that John should follow him. "He turned many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, and made ready a people prepared for the Lord<sup>1</sup>." He effected a spiritual and moral regeneration, and peace, and good-will, and charity, were restored in Israel. All were of one mind, both father and son, and the one looked down with fatherly love, and anxiety for his child's spiritual welfare, and the other looked up with dutiful affection. Idolatry did indeed again rear its head, and exercise its demoralizing influence, but never regained its former

<sup>1</sup> Luke i. 16, 17.

height. Elijah effectually broke its power. Henceforth its struggles were for existence and not for dominion. A great change was wrought in Israel, and as their captivity approached, they were made capable of comfort, and enabled by their prophets, the successors of Elijah, to look onward to the final deliverance by the Son of God. Thus Elijah, whose voice was indeed one in the desert, he, even he only, remaining of the prophets of God, prepared the way of the Lord, and made straight a path for his God. The consequences of this grand and apostolic preaching of conversion are traceable throughout the remaining history of Israel. But its example stays not there. It is a shining light which shall be seen and hailed to the last day of the Church on earth. Many have arisen already in the spirit of Elijah (to apply the phrase in a lower sense), and many will arise hereafter. Some, as Luther (whose temperament seems to have resembled Elijah's), have lived like him to see the fruit of their labours. Others again, like Cranmer, and Ridley, and Latimer, have died amid the fires of their sacrifice. But the fire of God's Holy Spirit has been there, and a glorious blaze has risen before the mental eyes of the people, and warmed their hearts with in-dwelling truth. So powerful is one man with God against multitudes without God. So prevails he who is of the one true opinion against them that halt between two opinions.

This public conversion was followed up by a withdrawal of the curse of the drought. So quickly do God's returning mercies wait upon the penitent. They seem to follow erring man like angels unwilling to lose him, and in the moment that he turns round

in penitence, they are looking him in the face. Elijah retired to the top of Mount Carmel to await the event. His mind was full of the spiritual mercy which God had shown his people, and anxiously looking forward in faith to the temporal which was to follow. He cast himself upon the earth and put his face between his knees. The prayer of thanksgiving for the past, and of hope for the future<sup>1</sup> was in his heart. Not that he doubted of the future; he was assured of it by God's promise. Faith in the accomplishment is the very food and aliment of prayer for future and promised blessings. Did not Daniel pray for the restoration of Jerusalem when he was assured that the seventy weeks appointed for her desolation were on the very point of accomplishment? Do we not pray unto God that his kingdom may come, although we be all the while assured that it will come? Such prayer is not to gain certainty for uncertainty, not to remove doubts and anxieties, but it is a dwelling upon God's promise, a clinging fast to it, while it wafts us to the fulfilment. It is an exercise of the lively hope of things unseen, feeling them through faith as if they were seen. It is a preparing of the heart to use God's gift in the first moment that it comes, lest we lose a drop of its preciousness from unskilfulness of handling: a breaking up of the ground, so that it be ready for the very first smiting of the sun and blowing of the wind. It is an expression of thankfulness for what is to come made by throwing ourselves into God's hands, as, when it is come, we feel ourselves in God's hands. It is the reliance on God's truth

<sup>1</sup> James v. 18.

preparatory to the experience of his truth. It is the pure spiritual anticipation which chastises an enjoyment which must be in some degree carnal. But Elijah was also moved with jealousy for God's honour, which was all this while, if not doubted, yet not undoubted, in the hearts of Ahab and his people. Seven times did he command his servant to go and look towards the sea, if he could see any thing. At the seventh time the servant announced the arising of a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. This is the sure forerunner of rain in that country even at this day. God's word was now fulfilled. He sent to Ahab to hasten his departure lest the rain should stop him. And in the mean time the heavens were black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. Lively must have been the joy to the carnal heart. But how stirring, how tumultuous to the spiritual. These drops, bringing down fatness from heaven to the wasted earth, were a token that God was reconciled to his people. Precious, indeed, were they. They palpably typified the descent of his spiritual blessings upon men, and a grateful heart might have quoted with holy delight the words of the Psalmist, "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth<sup>1</sup>."

The nation had rest ; but Elijah's troubles were soon as great as before. The weak Ahab related the whole of the late transaction to Jezebel. She was filled with indignation and rage at the disgrace and death of her prophets, and vowed to avenge it upon Elijah. The king wanted firmness, and perhaps

<sup>1</sup> Psalm lxxii. 6.

inclination, to support him, and the people looked tamely on. Idolatry was already regaining its influence among them. He fled, and did not pause in his flight, not only before he quitted the land of Israel, but not even before he had reached Beer-sheba, the southernmost extremity of Judah.—Throughout the land of the people of God there was not a resting-place for the weary sole of the foot of the prophet of God. He had formerly taken refuge among the heathen, but now he fled from man altogether, and dismissing his servant, advanced a day's journey into the wilderness. There he took up his lodging under a juniper-tree, and gave vent to his indignation and despondency at the unthankful conduct of his countrymen, requesting God that he might die, and crying out, "It is enough now, O Lord! take my soul, for I am no better than my fathers." Meaning, that there was no reason that he should still be kept living, when his fathers had died at a like age, or under like circumstances. This prayer can scarcely be altogether the product of human weakness. Against weariness and unworthy treatment indeed, no child of Adam is proof. Jonah made a similar request from wounded feelings<sup>1</sup>. But the ensuing conduct of Elijah shows that it was shame and indignation at the thankless unbelief of his countrymen, which was vexing his righteous soul. He was, therefore, unburdening his soul before God, and confidence in him caused him to open all his heart to him, to whom all good men confess all their hopes and fears, and cast down the burden

<sup>1</sup> Jonah iv. 3.

of their uneasiness in his presence. They have exceeding comfort in making him their only friend, a witness to their thus divesting themselves, and as his presence is full of all good things, they take up these instead. If they express their fear, it is but to fling it away, and take up courage in him. If they vent their despair, it is but to have hope instead. If they come to the heavenly vestry clad in the sable garment of mourning, what is it for, but to put on the snow-white robes of joy? If they enter his courts in chains and show them, what means it, but that they know that he can and will deliver them. All this is very different from the idle complaints of the distrustful in God. And God was not regardless of his faithful and much-enduring servant. He sent an angel to feed him, and in the strength of this angelic food he went forty days and forty nights until he reached the awfully sacred spot of Mount Horeb. Thus God threw a glorious dignity around him. The great lawgiver had so fasted in this very mount before him, and so the Son of man fasted in the wilderness after him. Here he took up his lodging in a cave, and was honoured with a manifestation of the glorious presence of the Lord, similar to that which Moses had witnessed. A great and strong whirlwind, followed by an earthquake and fire, shook the mountain, and brake it in pieces before the Lord. After this was heard a still small voice, which Elijah, recognising as the divine oracle, and covering his face with his mantle, as before the tremendous presence of God, stood forward in the entrance of the cave. The voice demanded, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" And he

answered, " I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenants, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword : and I, even I only, am left ; and they seek my life to take it away." The Lord comforted him by telling him that he had left yet 7000 men in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and assured him of his life by bidding him go, and return on his way to the wilderness of Damascus, and anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, Jehu over Israel, and Elisha as his own successor. Thus it is that the faithful ever obtain a still higher trust from God, and he who is faithful with ten talents, is set over ten cities. To all human appearance, Elijah's influence was gone. He was even out of remembrance, neither eye saw him, nor ear heard him. At best he was thought of as a miserable exile, fleeing from desert to desert, and from cave to cave. Yet all at once he reappeared charged with a higher office from God. The persecuted of kings had commission to pull down and raise up kings. He seemed powerless. Yet with a palmful of oil he was destined to overthrow monarchies. He was met going solitary, and surrounded with perils, while he was on his journey to depose the family of the very king who was seeking his life. He was met posting on his way with staff in hand, weary, dusty, and in mean attire, and none knew upon what errand he was bound. And so it often happens with God's ambassadors in their journey through this life. Their mighty commission is not disclosed until after they have gone. None suspect their extraordinary charge. None

see the inward working of God. The world disregards them. They appear poor and mean, and ridiculously inadequate to the mighty effects which follow. Yet after many days their work appears, and their commission is read in tottering churches and reeling empires. The world sees not the fermenting of their work until it burst forth in flames above the level of society, and soar above the heads of nobles and princes. Then the scroll of their high commission is unrolled, and men read and tremble. These are the men that change the face of the world, these men of the sword of the Spirit, and not of the sword of the flesh, these spiritual vanquishers, and not earthly conquerors. Thus was Christianity, the greatest change which was ever wrought on earth, established by the poor and ignorant fishermen of Galilee. And thus their successors, however overlooked by a giddy world, are working still, and will work until all be finished, anointing to themselves successors to carry on the holy work unto the end of the world. Elijah shortly performed one part of his commission. In his way he found Elisha ploughing, and threw his mantle upon him. The youth only asked to bid farewell to his father and mother, and then followed him. Thus he gave the example to all who have since forsaken father and mother for Christ's sake.

We lose sight of Elijah for a time. Scripture breaks off its narrative of him in order to relate another signal mercy of God to his people, whose repentance so lately effected, but of so brief an existence among the multitude, he was not yet weary of rewarding. Ahab gained a signal victory

over the Syrians, who had besieged him in his capital of Samaria. Benhadad their king was taken prisoner. God's interference was manifest through one of his prophets, who brought his especial orders to Ahab. Yet notwithstanding this the weak and wicked Ahab persisted in his course. And lest for a moment his inclination to iniquity should slumber, the execrable Jezebel was always at hand to arouse it into fatal activity. In order to gain so trifling a point as the coveted possession of a vineyard, he compassed, at her suggestions, the judicial murder of its owner, Naboth. In the very moment of his taking possession, in the midst of the revelry of his joy of occupation, on the spot of his bloody usurpation, he was surprised by the unwelcome appearance of the long lost Elijah. He knew too well the meaning of the visit. He knew that the word of God had found him out to denounce him. It intruded rudely upon his fancied security, when he thought that he had put it quite out of sight. The long labour of his iniquity was lost. In his perplexity of mingled rage and fear, he exclaimed, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" "I have found thee," answered the prophet, taking him up in his own words, with the stern and authoritative address of a messenger of God to a sinner. And he followed up the words with God's dreadful denunciation against his house, and against Jezebel. Ahab (whose weak and passive character depended much on the persons around him, and the circumstances of the moment) could not withstand the horror of this fearful sentence. In the boldness of Elijah, he recognised the authority which had so lately discomfited the prophets of idolatry before

the face of the assembled nation : and in the penalty he saw, at length, the reflection of his crime. He rent his robes, and put on sack-cloth, and fasted, and went barefoot. God was pleased to accept of this penitence, and Elijah was commissioned to declare the postponement of the sentence to the days of his successors. The curse began to operate upon his very first successor. His son, Ahaziah, being dangerously hurt by a fall, sent, after the idolatrous notions of his devoted family, to consult Beelzebub, the god of Ekron. His messengers were met in their way by Elijah, whom an angel had purposely forewarned. He reproved them for their idolatrous design, and turned them back again with a message to Ahaziah, saying, "Thou shalt not come down from thy bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." Ahaziah immediately suspected the deliverer of this message. It could come from no one but him whom his mother, if not his father, had taught him to look upon as the unrelenting enemy of his house. On asking for a description of the man, he was told that, "He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins." "It is Elijah the Tishbite," he immediately cried out, and sent a captain of fifty with his men to seize him. Elijah was sitting on the top of a hill. The captain went up to him, and said, "Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down." The prophet answered, "If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty." And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. The same fate befel two more captains which were sent: after

which, admonished by an angel, he went and delivered in person his fatal message to the king, and the king died.

The term of Elijah's ministry now approached. In this too he shared with Moses the lot of an extraordinary departure ; and extraordinary were the signs of its approach. As Elisha attended his master, and passed successively through Bethel and Jericho, the prophets belonging to the colleges at those places, announced to him, " that the Lord would take away his master from his head that day." Thus the whole brotherhood had his departure revealed to them as an event concerning the Church of God. When they reached the Jordan, Elijah smote the waters with his folded mantle, and they divided hither and thither, and gave them a dry passage to the other bank. Elijah then asked his intended successor, what he should do for him, before he was taken away. He begged for a double portion of his spirit. Thou hast asked a hard thing, replied his master ; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee ; but if not, it shall not be so. As they were still walking on and talking, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

The whole history of Elijah furnishes a glorious and visible example of the manner in which God works with his faithful servants. It was ever in the memory of his countrymen down to the last hour of their national existence. The prophecy of Malachi had taught them to expect his

re-appearance just about the time that the Baptist came and preached the approach of the kingdom of God, and they anxiously looked forward to a magnificent exhibition of miracles, to which, it is too plain from their treatment of our Lord, they would have been as insensible as their forefathers. Elias did come, and they knew him not, but did unto him whatsoever they listed<sup>1</sup>. Let it be in the memory of the Christian also, let him read it, and mark it, making the right distinction between the times of a carnal and of a spiritual dispensation, knowing of what spirit he is. He will not look, even in his greatest need, for the external symbols of help which God vouchsafed to Elijah. He knows that he will assuredly have the benefit of the inward and essential co-operation. He will not call down fire from heaven to consume the adversary, unless it be the fire of the Holy Ghost to enlighten him. Nor will he expect the sign of visible fire from heaven to ratify his credentials before his hearers. He knows that it will come into the hearts of his hearers. He will not ask to hear the audible voice of God's angels charging him. He distinctly hears within the still small voice of the spirit prompting him. He will not look for carnal meat and drink to be miraculously supplied to his necessities; a series of miracles has already procured for him the spiritual meat and drink which perisheth not.

And in this his faithful prophet, God has proved that he will never leave himself without a witness upon earth. He, even he only, was left of the pro-

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxii. 12.

phets of God, and yet he, amid all the discouragement of a general apostasy, was more than equal to four hundred of the prophets of Baal. God's servants, however thinned and scattered, will never be left thus solitary again. They shall witness each the others toils and dangers, and build up one the other into a living temple of God. And if they be forced by tyrannous persecution to flee for a time to hiding-places, the spot of refuge shall be, as Elijah's, in the very mount of God. There they shall behold his glory, and hear him, and be comforted. Thence they shall issue forth, sent with renewed credentials to proclaim him before men. They shall anoint to themselves successors to carry on their holy work to the end of the world. And their departure, however it seem to the eyes of men, however miserable, shall be to them as the mounting into the fiery chariot; for they die to a certain resurrection in glory. And in the last day they shall be seen with Moses and Elias bathing in the blissful brightness of the glory which surrounds them in the company of their redeeming Lord.

## JOSIAH.

B. C. 649—610.

THE reign of this prince is like a gleam cast from a lowering sky, before it bursts with the tempest. Under his government Judah rose only to fall with greater violence afterwards. At the early age of eight years he began to reign, and at the age of sixteen, when he had become his own master, began to meditate the holy work of the restoration of true religion. At the age of twenty he entered upon it by taking measures for the destruction of idolatry. This was a difficult task. His wicked father, Ammon, had undone in a short reign of two years all that the penitent Manasseh had done in the course of thirty. Idolatry had needed but the slightest encouragement to rear its head again, and the Chaldean worship of the heavenly host, the Persian worship of the horses of the sun, the Syrian worship of Baal, the Sidonian of Ashtarothe, the Ammonite of Moloch, the Moabitish of Chemosh, with similar abominations, were flourishing in the land. The temple was partly profaned by idolatrous altars set up in its courts, and groves attached to it, and had partly been left to fall into disgraceful ruin. The idolaters were a powerful body in the land, and would naturally have the countenance of the mighty nations without, whose pupils

they were. But Josiah was undismayed. The glory of God was his guiding pillar of fire. He knew that he was God's anointed minister, and had a strict account to render. He tore up idolatry by root and branch, not only in Jerusalem, and throughout Judea, but throughout Israel too. Six years were consumed in this work of demolition; so fast was the hold which idolatry had obtained in the land of God's promise, so determined was his perseverance. At last, in the eighteenth year of his reign, he began the repairs of the temple. It was in carrying on these, that Hilkiah, the high-priest, found the book of the law. It was perhaps the autograph of Moses, which was laid up in the ark, and had been lost or hidden during the reign of idolatry. It was brought to the king, and to him every word was new. What a striking proof is here of the low state of the true religion. If a pious king, like Josiah, could be so ignorant, what must have been the knowledge of the vulgar. The worship of Jehovah must clearly have been little better than a mere mummary, a tissue of ceremonies, of which the meaning was lost; a set of rules, of which the sense was not understood. The spirit had taken flight. The dead letter alone remained. Can we wonder that idolatry gained upon such a state of things? When divine things are thus abandoned to mere tradition, not only do they lose their original meaning, but also obtain new and false senses from human devices. The sacrifices offered now, without the comprehension of their spirit, without recorded command, could not appear so different from those of the heathen; and the rites of idolatry would lose much of their

hideousness. When the book was brought to the king, and he saw written therein his own duty of acquaintance with its statutes, saw how ill the practice of the nation agreed with its precepts, read the dreadful denunciations which it made upon disobedience, and on lifting up his eyes from its pages saw Babylon close at hand, the ready minister of God's vengeance, the very person of the avenger prophetically shadowed there, he was seized with exceeding fear, and rent his clothes for anguish. He had begun the reformation from the dictates of a godly heart. But now his eyes were opened to a prospect of which he had never dreamed. He had previously dreaded God's vengeance from general causes. He now saw them absolutely denounced, and written by the hand of God. How confounded must he have been at his utter ignorance of that law, which he now found was appointed for his daily and nightly study, as the guard and defender of the truth in the Church of God. Would that Christian princes could make the same discovery! Affrighted and humbled, he sent to the prophetess Huldah, to know the will of the Lord, and inquire by what means his wrath may be turned away. The answer was of melancholy import. The judgment on the nation was declared irreversible, but he himself, as having sought and turned unto God, was especially exempted from the pain of seeing its infliction. It was to wait until he should be gathered to his fathers. To a patriotic king, who hoped to restore his falling country ;—to a religious king, who wished to maintain the Church of God in the land, such an answer was disheartening indeed. Yet full of obedience

and submission to the will of Heaven, Josiah went on with a godly cheerfulness, restoring as if for ages what he knew must shortly again be levelled to the ground. He was certain, that in less than fifty years not one stone would be left upon another of all that he was so laboriously piling up. How different from the Christian builder. He builds for ever in the hearts of men, and not a tittle of his labour falls to the ground! How different even from Solomon, to whom, the Lord, on beginning his work, promised to dwell among his people, and not to forsake Israel. Alas! Israel had already gone into captivity, the first-fruits of the total extermination which was at hand. How different even from Hezekiah, to whom it was not disclosed, until after he had repaired the temple, that Babylon should throw it down again. But this unhappy king was overshadowed with the wings of Babylon hovering over the land, and ready to pounce upon her prey. And the voice of prophecy, as it had come to Hezekiah, as it had issued from the lips of Isaiah, and as it was now pouring forth amid the sobs of Jeremiah, rang her name unceasingly into the ears of princes and people. Babylon, Babylon, was the word of terror with which to still the cries of the infant, and to cool the presumption of youth. Never did one among princely builders, build under such auspices. It is natural to entertain, in the very moment of pride, melancholy forebodings of the destruction of their boasted pile. But Josiah knew almost the year, and hour, and day of its demolition. The ruin of their pile would at the worst be but an accompaniment to the ruin of their country or their line, and be but one among

many ruins. But there was, and could be but one Temple, and in that was involved Church and nation, truth and happiness, life and liberty, bodily and spiritual. Could Josiah have been selfish enough to be comforted by the assurance that it would last his time, he would never have had heart to undertake the work at all. But his was that godly high-minded feeling which prompts a man to do his duty, however fruitless it may appear; who is resolved to be found at his post, however hopeless the cause. Cheerfully, therefore, he persevered, although the sound of the axe that carved must perpetually have suggested the thoughts of the axe which was so shortly to hew down.

Great, indeed, was the responsibility of a king of Judah. Under God he was head of Church and State. His very office was typical of the spiritual King to come. It was his business to see that the high-priest, and all under him did their duty, and for this he was charged by Moses to read the law diligently. His example, therefore, was itself of great power, for good or for evil. In the moment that he turned unto God, God turned the hearts of the whole nation also with him. There had been a signal example of this in Hezekiah's reformation, and now was another. God stirred up the hearts of Judah, as one man, to meet the pious endeavours of Josiah. The repairs of the Temple were finished, and all the men of Judah, the priests, and all the people, great and small, went up to the house of the Lord. There the king, standing by the pillar in his usual place, and in his true character as shepherd of God's flock, read out to them the long-forgotten words of the book of the covenant,

and set the example of making a solemn covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul. So well did the people second him here, that during his lifetime they never turned back from the Lord God of their fathers. Alas ! how few, if any, Christian princes have made their lives equally efficacious. As he had hitherto followed the example of Hezekiah, so he did in keeping with peculiar solemnity the national festival of the Passover. This, beyond all others, referred them to Jehovah, as their Saviour and peculiar Lord. The participation of it to the penitent Jew was precisely that which the communion of the Lord's Supper is to the returning Christian. But this memorial of deliverance had been long interrupted, so much so, that, just as in the days of Hezekiah, the priests had to be sanctified and appointed to their respective charges : the courses appointed by David had to be restored. The people also required instruction. This was given them by the Levites, who also restored to its place the ark which had been removed in the confusion of the idolatrous times, and the holy volume taken out of it and lost. The feast was kept with unusual splendour, so that there had not been one like it since the days of Samuel. Not only all Judah and Benjamin were there, but the remnant of Israel also. It was the last meeting of a family in their Father's house, and at their Father's table, previously to their final dispersion. Never did Israel and Judah, as distinct tribes, in distinct portions of the land of promise, meet again. Surely

it was a blessed day to Josiah. The family of God stood up once again in its place, in all its peculiar character and trappings. The order of David was observed, even to the places of the singers. The very best and brightest days of the nation seemed to be revived. Around them was the temple purified from the former abominations, and restored from mouldering ruin to its former beauty. Before them stood Mount Olivet, cleared of all the accursed incumbrances which the apostate son of David had heaped upon it. Not an idol was seen. Not a grove of superstition was in sight. Not a yell of idolatrous worship was heard. The fires of Moloch were extinct. Blessed, indeed, was the day, and blessed were the eyes which beheld it. A few years past, and all was darkness and horror.

So did God bless and prosper the work of Josiah. In the outset he stood alone. In the end he had the whole nation at his side. God moved their hearts. How heart-stirring in every way is our contemplation of this excellent prince. At first we see him standing alone, a single pillar amid the ruin of the hearts of an apostate nation. He appears deserted by man. But how vividly does he exhibit the single-handed power of God arrayed against the impotence of crowds of men. He stands forth not only as his anointed, but as his representative, and bears about him all the trappings of spiritual royalty, all taken from the vestry of God : the throne established by God, the sceptre of justice, the robes of righteousness, the sword of the Spirit, the crown of everlasting life and glory. Human eye, however corrupt, cannot but admire, and honour, and obey.

Truly there is hope for a nation under such a king. In the end we see him triumphantly gathering the whole nation in his train in the temple of God. So it has been, and ever will be in God's Church. If rulers be hearty in its service, he endows them with supernatural might to fulfil their godly purposes. Jehosaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah, are bright and burning examples both of the duty, and of the powerful moral influences of religious princes. Every king should have them before him, and seek to establish his own kingdom by first seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Truly painful is it to lose sight of this last good king of Judah. We love to bask in the warmth of his shining example, and forget the gloom which so shortly came on. But Judah's days were numbered, and Josiah was to be mercifully spared from the pain of seeing their termination. Her situation was now one of exceeding peril and perplexity. She was placed between two great monarchies, that of Babylon, and that of Egypt. Syria had been removed from between them, and thus Palestine became a frontier country to two ambitious and ever clashing rivals. It would seem that Manasseh, on his restoration, was restored not only to the kingdom of Judah, but to the whole land of promise, holding his dominions under homage to the king of Babylon<sup>1</sup>. Under the same condition Josiah held them, and was thus bound to defend the frontier towards Egypt. When, therefore, Pharaoh-Necho,

<sup>1</sup> Such was the extent of Josiah's dominion. See 2 Chron. xxxiv. 6.

on his march against the Babylonian king, demanded a passage through the territory of Josiah, of course he was refused. A weak and wicked prince might have caught at his offers. But Josiah faithfully obeyed the power to which God had subjected him. He had received his throne on a pledge, and that he would not be tempted to violate. Knowing his exceeding piety, the Egyptian king pretended to have the express orders of God to undertake the expedition, and warned him against resisting the divine will. Josiah understood the divine will too well to be so deceived. He advanced with his army to Megiddo to meet him. There a battle took place, in which Josiah was mortally wounded early in the battle, by a shot from a bow. Thus remarkably was he spared from seeing the ruin of his country. From the moment of his death the affairs of his country, as at a stroke, went down in rapid and miserable ruin. Jerusalem became the prey of the conqueror, and never recovered the blow. He was sorely lamented by his countrymen, who under him had experienced a train of prosperity to which they had long been strangers. He was the theme of songs of mourning to the men and women of Judah for a long time after, and Israel renewed his weeping for him at established periods, and with appointed rites. But, above all, he was lamented, in a poem now lost, by the prophet Jeremiah.

Josiah was the most faultless character of all the princes of Judah or Israel. Some may think that he owes much of this brilliancy to the contrast of moral darkness which surrounded him. But let them consider how very much strength of spirit is

required to keep the lamp of the conscience shining in such times. None but extraordinary men can then stand forth all bright and alone. Ordinary characters accommodate their hues to those of surrounding objects, and are dark amid the dark. At best they are as the moonbeams on the ground, which take the shadow of every wave of the trees. But Josiah was as the moon in the firmament. The good run not with the spirit of their age, which knaves and fools deem such a merit. They stem the tide of its corruptions. They were Rehoboam, Jehoram, Ahaz, and Ammon, who yielded to this unclean spirit, and reaped the fruits accordingly. Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah wrestled with it, and overcame, and won a blessing from God. His will was their guide and their strength. Thus they kept a clear and straight path amid the dim tortuousness of their times. They had God before them, and turned neither to the right, nor to the left for man. Applause could not seduce them, and expediency, which means the surrender of the judgment and conscience to the pressure of the present moment, which is therefore nothing less than the barter of heaven for earth, of God for man, this foul moral corruption never tainted them. In the critical situation of Judah, hemmed in between two mighty empires, each intent on devouring it first, and filled with a powerful party, forming the majority of the nation, and having the bond of a common religion with those empires, undoubtedly expediency would recommend the conciliation of this party at any sacrifice. It persuaded Joash, Jehoram, and the rest, and dearly did they pay for their mistake. But Josiah, and the

two other reformers refused to listen to the voice of the charmer, however wisely it charmed. They knew that God would not away with idolatry. They knew and felt that as his vicegerents they had an especial charge to root it out. They shrank not from the struggle with it. They were well assured that, however formidable it may appear, and may wreath its hundred folds, and rear its crest, and roll its brazen eyes, and put forth its forked tongue and hiss, yet after all it was but the old serpent, which God hath given them charge and power to crush. They did crush it, and had for their reward reigns of peace and glory.

The righteousness of the kingdom of heaven is the salt of the kingdoms of earth. Without it they are corrupt, and must perish quickly and miserably. This, therefore, must be the aim of princes and of people. Here they must seek stability, and the honour and glory of the nation, must be an efflux of the honour and glory of that everlasting kingdom. Thus alone can they be safe from the jaws of that pit, which has devoured Babylon, and Persia, and Syria, and Rome, whose steam and smoke is daily rising up to warn the empires of the day. Wherever we live, let us remember that there is the land which the Lord God giveth us. There we must do him homage for it, serve him, and humbly obey him. This is the only tenure by which a nation has permanent hold of its possessions.

It must be, like Israel, the elect people of God, or, like Israel, it will perish. The example of Josiah is bright indeed, not only to princes, but to every Christian. How clearly does it exhibit the

grace of God, both to will and to do. When he takes up his stand on the sure ground of faith, when he has put before his eyes as his goal the honour and glory of his redeeming Lord, how secure is his station, how certain his victory. He stands not indeed alone. He is but one of an innumerable invincible army. For he stands in the array of the host of the Church of God. He is surrounded by its invisible army of saints. The trumpet of the martyrs and confessors is sounding in his ears. The voice of his great Captain of salvation is cheering him on. Let him in spirit call around him this glorious company, this holy confederacy. Let him cast aside with indignation all unworthy compliances with a selfish and grovelling world, and surely knowing, and deeply feeling whose soldier he is, he will in body and in spirit defy all its banded powers, will march boldly to the conflict, and, like the generous war-horse, cry Ha! ha! at the sound of the trumpet.

## EZRA.

B. C. 467.

CONSIDERED in an historical view, the Old Testament conveys the revelation of God's secret working in the moral world. The veil is taken off from the engines of his awful energy. Hence every act narrated is the embodied expression of the whole class of the acts of God's providence to the end of the world, just as in a book of natural history, is given the pictured individual animal to illustrate, and represent all the undelineated members of its class. Among these illustrative events however, is one, which at first sight, seems contrary to what has ever been held to be an universal rule, namely, that no nation, having  
✓ run its career of progress and decline, and fallen at last through its viciousness, has ever risen, or will ever rise again. But the facts, when looked into, only prove the certainty of the rule. The re-establishment of the Jewish nation was through the special interference of God, and the impossibility of a nation being renewed to repentance, so universally true, was in this particular instance annulled by God. The Jewish nation started afresh with all the innocence and vigour of an infant state. The single-minded obedience of the days of Abraham was renewed, and after his example, princes, and priests, and people

quitted with joy the ease, the comfort, the connections, the civilization of the land of their birth, and exchanged it for the peril, the unsettledness, the barbarism of the land of their fathers. After a vexatious delay of twenty years, the Temple at last was completely rebuilt and dedicated, and the labours of the prince Zerubbabel, the high-priest Jeshua, and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, who were unwearied in stimulating the work, were finally rewarded. But although the main object (which was no less than the visible re-establishment of the Church of God) had been happily accomplished, very much still remained to be done. The laws had to be re-established, the people to be instructed, the priests to be arranged in regular courses of duty. This part was reserved for Ezra, to whom his grateful countrymen assign the honour of a second founder, and put down next to Moses in the list of the upholders of their polity.

Ezra was of a sacerdotal family, and of the house of Aaron. Among his nearer ancestors he numbered the high-priest Hilkiah, who restored the lost word of God in the reign of Josiah, and Seraiah<sup>1</sup>, also high-priest, who suffered martyrdom at the hands of the king of Babylon, when he burnt the Temple<sup>2</sup>. Thus he had every incitement and generous motive which splendour of ancestry can bestow. He therefore gave himself up with all diligence to the study of that law which his forefathers had maintained with such zeal, and resistance even unto blood. He became a ready scribe in it, and was therefore properly

<sup>1</sup> Ezra vii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings xxv.

entrusted by the Persian king, with the conduct of a second body of returning Jews, and commissioned to settle on a permanent footing the civil and religious constitution of the country. It was indeed time. Fifty-seven years had elapsed since the completion of the Temple. And yet the nation could scarcely be said to be restored. The powers granted to Ezra were very ample. He had authority to appoint magistrates, and judges, and the infliction of capital punishment, even to death. He took with him a great quantity of silver and gold, to which not only the captive Jews, but even the king and his councillors largely contributed, expressly offering to the God of Israel. He was furnished also with vessels for the service of the Temple, some of which, perhaps, had belonged to the former house, and were now on their return with the people. Having completed his preparations, he quitted Babylon in the beginning of Spring, and in about a week joined the caravan which he had appointed to assemble on the river Ahavah<sup>1</sup>. Here he spent three whole days in reviewing the people. He found but two families of priests, and to his grief and dismay not one of the Levites. With much difficulty and entreaty he prevailed upon some families to accompany him. This unwillingness of the sacred tribe arose, no doubt, from the consideration, that they could have no portion in the land, but must depend upon tithes, the receipt of which could not but be precarious in an unsettled country. This obstacle was but imperfectly met by the king excusing the whole tribe of

<sup>1</sup> Probably a tributary to the Euphrates. It cannot now be identified.

Levi from tribute. Here too he delivered into the custody of the priests all the silver and gold, and vessels for the Temple. He then proclaimed a fast, that they might humbly entreat their God for guidance and protection. What an inestimable treasure would have been an account of the reflections of Ezra on this occasion. He was a scholar of celebrity in the history, and laws, and religion of his country. And now he was on his way to the land of his fathers, to the spots which were painted in his imagination in glowing colours, and associated with most heart-stirring events. He was going to breathe the same air, to look on the same scenes, to drink from the same wells, and rivers, to have all the same outward impressions as Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Samuel, and David, and Solomon; and Jerusalem, and Hebron, and Jordan, and Hermon, all the cities, and rivers, and mountains, sanctified by some work of God's mercy, rose to his mind. He was even proceeding to tread in the very track which Abraham had made when he first entered the land. But then he bethought him, that he should every where meet with ruins, and monuments of God's wrath executed upon his fathers. He would find their very tombs rifled. Yet from these mournful thoughts he could turn to themes of overpowering joy. He was going to restore the civil and religious polity of his country, and this was in effect to restore the visibility of the kingdom of heaven upon earth. He was bringing back from captivity and abeyance the prophecies, the sacrifices, the people which were to announce, and to give the Redeemer to mankind. He was bringing all mankind out of spiritual captivity, he was carry-

ing with him the regeneration of the world. The earthly Jerusalem was the end of his march, but the heavenly Jerusalem alone could terminate his pilgrimage. After a stay of three days, the assembled caravan began its march, and after a journey of four months arrived at Jerusalem, about Midsummer.

Deep and varied must have been the feelings of Ezra as he made his way through rubbish and ruins, which even his scholarship could scarcely identify, and gazed at last upon the temple, rising in solitary majesty above the fragments of palaces and walls, and towering over the ragged half-built town. How clearly had the abomination of desolation left the print of his foot-track! And even that house had lost its essential furniture, the in-dwelling of the cloud of glory. Yet not for ever. The voice of prophecy proclaimed that the glory should return, though his eyes should not see it. Meanwhile he rejoined brethren, friends, and countrymen, all engaged in the same holy work, and welcoming him and his company with all the gladness of a triumph. The first three days Ezra assigned to collecting and arranging the gifts and treasures which he had brought with him, and on the fourth he delivered them into the hands of the priests, and verified his commission to the lieutenants of the king, and then the whole company offered sacrifice in behalf of themselves and all their dispersed brethren. What a moment was this to a mind like Ezra's! It was the first time that he had offered sacrifice, and as he knew, if any one, the virtue of the rite, how must his soul have been overjoyed at regaining this

inestimable and lofty privilege of the sons of God, this means of communication with his mercy, this embodied prophecy, which his eyes could see, and hands could handle, of redemption to life everlasting.

But his satisfaction was soon interrupted. The very nature indeed of his commission must have prepared him to find a very unsettled, and, as regarded the precepts of Moses, unlawful state of things. But he did not expect the extent to which their recklessness had gone. The chiefs came and informed him of a matter which went to the very vitals of the existence of the new state. Not only the common people, but they who should have known better, the priests and the Levites, had taken wives from the heathens, even from the tribes which were under God's especial curse, as the Hittites, the Amorites, and the rest of the Canaanites, and were mingling with them, and doing according to their abominations. Here was afflicting news indeed. Had there even been no law against such intermarriage, yet common discretion, the slightest thought given to God's will, the most superficial acquaintance with their own history, should have held them back. How could they look for pure servants of Jehovah in children born of the womb and nursed in the arms of worshippers of Baal? Was not their history full of the miserable effects of idolatry thus introduced into the nation? Had not Jezebel alone introduced it into two lines of kings, both of Israel and of Judah<sup>1</sup>, and thence among the people, and thus brought on their former destruction? They

<sup>1</sup> The good Jehoshaphat in an evil hour united his son Jehoram to Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel.

were undoing with their own hands the very work to which God had appointed them, for which alone he had kept them together, and had brought them back. Would he not cast them off, and seek builders of his temple elsewhere? Inexpressible, therefore, was the grief of Ezra at this news. He rent (he says) his garment and his mantle, and plucked off the hair of his head and of his beard, and sat down astonished. In this sorrow he was joined by all that trembled at the word of God in Israel, amid whom he sate down in the silent stupor of grief until the evening sacrifice. At that hour, when it was customary for each worshipper to accompany the offering of incense with his prayers, Ezra, poured out his heart before God in a most imploring and sorrowful prayer, confessing the thankless disobedience with which they had returned so great mercy. So strongly did this prayer and his tears affect the people, that there flocked to him a very great congregation of men, and women, and children. And the people wept very sore. This shows how much they had profited by adversity. The people, which before the chastisement of their captivity, had set at naught all God's statutes, and had persecuted, mocked, and stoned all his prophets which rebuked them, were now broken in heart, and melted into tears at the upbraiding of Ezra. So heartily did they second him in this work of reformation, that a court of inquiry having been appointed to investigate the matter, in the course of three months the evil was entirely removed.

Thus the ground was cleared, and Ezra could now begin to re-erect the fabric of Church and State. But the unsettled condition of the Jews, especially at the

capital, seems to have very much hindered, if not stopped, his progress. It is true that men and not walls constitute a state, and laws, and institutions, are its moral and only lasting bulwarks. But personal security is requisite for their erection, and this Jerusalem had not. Her walls were still in ruin, her gates had been burnt with fire. Ezra had no commission to restore these. Under such disadvantages he laboured for thirteen years. At the end of that time the news of the sad state of his countrymen, how that the remnant left of the captivity in the province were in great affliction and reproach, and that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down, and the gates thereof burnt with fire, was brought to Nehemiah, a Jew of high rank, who was filling the honourable station of cup-bearer to the Persian king, Artaxerxes. He was so much affected with the melancholy account, that he sought and obtained leave to go himself to Jerusalem, commissioned with full powers to rebuild her walls. After much opposition from the jealousy of the neighbouring tribes, he effected this work. And now at length they were at leisure to set about the work of re-establishing their civil and religious institutions, and Ezra again forms the prominent figure of the day. The people met as one man in one of the streets of Jerusalem, and here Ezra mounted on a wooden pulpit, read to them in the law of Moses from morning until mid-day. The day was most appropriately chosen, being the first day of the seventh month. This was the commencement of their civil year, and was solemnized by the feast of trumpets, the stirring sound of which now ushered in

the re-establishment of the law, as it had formerly its delivery. It was also the anniversary of the former settlement of their religion at Jerusalem by the dedication of Solomon's Temple. With such associations the people came together. As soon as Ezra opened the book, the vast and breathless multitude stood up, and on his blessing God, they all answered, Amen, Amen, lifting up their hands, and bowing their heads, and worshipping with their faces to the ground. When they heard the words of the law they wept. They were overcome with the consciousness of having so long, and so grievously offended against them, with the thoughts of having been so long deprived of the word of God, of the chief prerogative of their station as his people. So completely had God's chastisement changed the heart of this stiff-necked race. Their captivity was now ended, their temple restored, their wall rebuilt, and God's word once again sounded in their ears. It was a blessed hour, it was that hour so precious both to nations and individuals, when, God having bruised and not broken, the sense of returning health and joy is quickened by the fresh memory of pain and sorrow. Then all the gates of the soul are lifted up, and the word of the King of Glory enters in. The temple of the heart is filled with its brightness, and the thoughts are clothed with light as with a garment. But if they wept in the joy of the accepted penitent, so did they in sorrow for what they had lost. They had forgotten the very language of the law. How were they estranged from their God, and from their fathers! The Psalmist had spoken of the mercy shown to Israel when he

came out of Egypt, and had heard a strange language<sup>1</sup>. But now, alas ! he was come into his own land, and heard a strange language. Yea, the language of his fathers, of their deeds, of their covenant, of their promises, of their laws, of their religion, was strange to him. He found himself an alien. He stood as one deaf, as a child incapable of speech, as one bereft of sense. It was necessary to interpret the law to him piecemeal. What an interval of painful rebuke and shame must have been that of the reading of each portion of the original. He was removed by a whole step from God, whose message he could not understand until the turn of the interpreter came. He was as a foreigner receiving communication from a foreign prince. During this mournful interval many a pious gaze no doubt was directed to the temple, and the thought of how much was wanting there cut him with reproof to the heart. Restored he was, but not to his former place. He was at a greater distance than before. Some portion of God's confidence had been evidently withdrawn. No wonder then that the people wept. Still deeper cause had they for it than Josiah.

The day was a joyous holiday ; yet noon came, and Israel was still weeping. It was probably the first time and the last, that, on this or any other holiday, a multitude was obliged to be bidden and prest by their spiritual guides to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves. Nehemiah, and Ezra, and the Levites that taught the people, said to them. " This day is holy unto the Lord your God. Mourn not, nor

<sup>1</sup> Psalm lxxxi. 5.

weep. Go your way: eat the fat, and drink the sweet . . . . neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." So their weeping was turned into joy. On the next day the reading was resumed, and then they discovered the precept for observing the feast of tabernacles, and that the days set apart for its celebration were close at hand<sup>1</sup>. Never did this festival touch them so nearly, since the days of Joshua. They were brought back very much to the situation of their fathers of that day. Like them they had just arrived in the land after a long captivity and weary journey. But instead of their former riot and revelry, they now listened every day of the feast to the reading of the law by Ezra. Now their hearts were no longer fat, and they felt its meaning. They were possessed with all the holy joy, with all the blissful peace of mind, with all the fervent thankfulness of the accepted penitent. Among such celebrators Ezra would be foremost. From his great piety, and from his intimate knowledge of the history of his fathers, he would feel the mercy most keenly. O how blessed indeed is the mind of the godly scholar! How does it teem with the circumstantial detail of God's mercies, seeing them come down in a train of light from the past, blazing around his present and beaming on into the night of the future. He is admitted into a kind of ubiquity by which to accompany the ubiquity of God's mercies. He goes up to heaven and finds them there. He goes down to the deep, and finds them there also. His memory is a living and grateful chronicle

<sup>1</sup> Levit. xxiii.

of their times and seasons, and experience enables him to discern them in active energy where common minds see but the common-place of human agency. He has the fellowship of the Holy Ghost in all his wide excursions, sanctifying every spot of his imagination. All is full of God to him ; God's is all the world, past, present, and to come, and all the fulness thereof ; angels, and spirits, and men, and thoughts, and words, and deeds, are all God's with him, and with him he that was in the beginning, now is, and ever shall be.

To Ezra, and to this occasion has been assigned by unanimous Jewish and Christian tradition, the first collection and canon of all the books of Scripture. And to his patient teaching we must impute the generally prevailing knowledge of Scripture among the Jews after their captivity, so strongly contrasted with their ignorance before it, when a high-priest and a king were astonished at the contents of the book which they had rescued from a long oblivion. They were too well informed ever after to relapse into idolatry. Thus he prepared a highway for his God. Few teachers and expounders have been blessed with such visible fruits of their labours as was Ezra. As a preacher, he had the satisfaction of turning away the people for ever from their besetting and besotting crime of idolatry. As a scholar, he had rescued God's holy word from all danger of the fate which had befallen it in the days of king Josiah. And may not all scholars of the word of God, though they be not blessed with the same proof of the efficacy of their labours, work on in the same unshaken confidence, with the same

ardent zeal, with the same cheerful hope? If the truth as it is in Christ be their object, verily not one iota of their labours shall lose its reward. He who will not let a sparrow needlessly fall to the ground, will not assuredly suffer any of their precious hours to be consumed in vain. He will bless them, though the world bless them not, he will number them into the precious treasury of the time of his church. How often has he surprised mankind with the unlooked for works of the nurslings of his truth and wisdom. From a closet retired from every worldly eye, from a student overlooked by all surrounding society, has more than once proceeded a volume which has waked as with a shout a slumbering world, and set on fire all the hearts of mankind. From a depth to which no worldly mind could go, he has drawn up waters of so sweet unwonted freshness, as has made the world wonder at the deliciousness of the draught.

How thankful should scholars be on comparing their blessedness with that of Ezra. Their labours may illustrate the Gospel of life and freedom of the spirit, while he pored over the law of penalty and bondage of the letter. They can preach to the world of Christ. He could but exhort the Jew from Moses. In the midst of his labours, which were continually interrupted from without, when he fathomed his mind, and called up his thoughts from their remotest depths and corners, what spirits were they, after all, which came to his call? Dim shadows moving against a curtain, mere outline filled up with darkness: no colour, no feature, did he see. Nothing was particular, all was generality. But the Christ-

ian scholar has had this veil updrawn from before his mind. Both the figures and the light are immediately before his eyes. He has his Redeemer's words, deeds, person, exhibited before him, with all the accompanying train of glory, figure rising after figure, feature after feature, gesture after gesture. Yea, let the Christian scholar look to Ezra, and admire, and be thankful.

Another work ascribed by unanimous tradition to Ezra, is the re-establishment of the courses of the services of the priests. To furnish a regular supply to the temple, David had divided the priests into twenty-four courses, which served each two weeks. So plentiful a supply left nothing wanting to the magnificence and high scale of splendour which attended every thing belonging to the temple. But this was shorn away together with the rest of its glories. Out of the twenty-four courses, four only returned from captivity. To keep up the same number, each of these was subdivided into six, and had the old names imposed on them. Hence in our Lord's time we hear of the course of Abiah, which was the eighth under David. Thus was a veil drawn over this nakedness of the ministry of the temple, and in a few generations it was only to the prying eye of the scholar that the inward deficiency was visible.

How, and where Ezra finished his laborious and useful life, Scripture does not say. That he should have returned to Babylon seems little accordant with his high-minded and godly patriotism. We may therefore, very reasonably adopt the account of Josephus, who tells us that he died at a very

advanced age, and was buried with great pomp at Jerusalem. Thus ended the course of this faithful servant of God. Well were it if all priests belonged to his course, took him for their head and model, and served their little fortnight of existence in God's temple with the same diligence. He was, indeed, one of those bright and burning lights in the Church of God, to which posterity turns with reverence and thankfulness, for the blessed radiance of truth and comfort, which flows to them from it. The word of the Old Covenant, which we at this day hold in  
✓ our hands, we mainly owe, under God, to his diligence and piety. So carefully did he provide for its maintenance and diffusion, so inculcate it into the hearts of the people, that in despite of attacks such as it had never experienced under the old temple, in despite of the bloody attempts of the Syrian kings to blot it out of the catalogue of books, it has never once come, nor been in danger of coming, into the jeopardy which befell it in the days of Josiah. Through him we have the law and the prophets bearing their testimony to our great spiritual head, and we see Moses and Elias attending upon him. Let us study the example of this great benefactor. He left all for the word of God, as did afterwards Andrew and Peter for Christ. He gave up all the comforts of life, a settled home, a civilized people, the leisure enjoyed under a regular government, for an unsettled life amid the revolting turbulence and distraction of a newly settled colony. Like his great predecessor Moses, he preferred suffering with the people of God, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater

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riches than all the treasures of Babylon<sup>1</sup>. When we consider how the habits and cultivated mind of the scholar revolt from the turbulent vulgarity and ignorance of the multitude, how his thoughts are dispersed, his feelings wounded, his time broken up by most occupations which bring him among them, and when we take into the account the reluctance to practical detail produced by his speculative habits, we cannot but admire Ezra's piety, entire self-devotion, and complete surrender of all his desires, and all his gifts to the service of God. He was a scholar of the only true school, and therefore his masculine vigour of mind was never in danger of being broken by the effeminate dreaminess, by the moral ricketiness, which is so often the wages of ill-directed literary leisure. The truth of God was his sole aim, the word of God was his study, and wherever these are, there is all the buxom health and freshness of mind. For there it is uncontracted and unbenumbed by unnatural position, unfettered by narrow room, but stretches itself forth in all the graceful freedom of action to the whole extent of its excellent proportions. It is fresh with the life of the life-giving spirit, it is strong from the manly exercise of spiritual wrestling, it is pure from bathing in the wells of truth. Such is the learned priest of God, such is the Christian scholar, after the model of Ezra. And God be thanked that he hath granted many such shining examples to our Church, blessed be his holy name for the many and great benefits which we are at this

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. 26.

moment, but too unwittingly, deriving from them. May it please him to prolong the illustrious succession, to maintain his word pure, and rightly understood among us. And may we, on looking towards them, count light after light, as lamps of the temple of the living God, and bow our heads in thankfulness to him who hath done so much to prepare us for his service, as a peculiar people.

## JAMES THE ELDER.

A. D. 44.

Six hundred years had past away, since the glory of the Lord had forsaken the temple, and Judah cast a dissatisfied look at the pile, which, however superb in outward decoration, wanted that inward boast of its predecessor. Directed by the voice of the last prophet, men were anxiously looking forward to the re-appearance of that heavenly indweller, and crowds expecting to walk in its light, and enjoy its illumination, when it once again shone in the land. The bright shining cloud, the peculiar symbol of the Lord's presence, descended upon the Mount, and spread its glittering folds over the heads of three disciples of Jesus, who there beheld him transfigured into the Lord of glory, and attended by Moses and Elias, the representatives of the old and expiring dispensation. These were Peter, and the brothers John and James<sup>1</sup>, the same who were admitted as witnesses of the contrasted spectacle of his agony in the garden<sup>2</sup>. Thus they saw him in his extremes of exaltation and humiliation, and although they understood neither at the time, yet the deep spiritual sense of both came upon them afterwards, through the gift of the Holy Ghost, and their gloomy conflict with the per-

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xvii.

<sup>2</sup> Ib. xxvi. 37.

secuting world, which was prefigured to them by the one, was ever comforted with the blaze and light of joy which poured in upon them from the memory of the other<sup>1</sup>. They were his favourite disciples, with whom on several occasions he communicated exclusively. They therefore present themselves first to the notice of one who is entering into the particulars of the lives of the disciples of Jesus.

James, of these three, was the first to quit the tabernacle of mortal flesh, and called to enjoy a perpetuity of the fruition of that heavenly vision, of which he had been favoured upon earth with but a transitory glance. This early removal forbids much detail of his history, nor is there any of Scripture narrative in which he bears a separate part, except in the close of his life. Since the case is very different with his companions, it will be convenient to refer to him alone what he has in common with them.

Jesus had returned into Galilee after experiencing among his own kinsmen and acquaintance at Nazareth, the first-fruits of the general rejection of his fellow-countrymen. Attended by an immense crowd, which prest upon him, he came to the side of the Lake of Gennesareth, and there relieved himself from the pressure by betaking himself to Peter's boat, where he sate, and preached to the people as they stood on the brink. In company with this boat was another containing fishermen of the same party. These were the brothers, James and John, with their father Zebedee. Jesus having called Peter and

<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter i. 16.

Andrew to "follow him, and he would make them fishers of men," going a little farther saw these brothers too, and called them also. Strongly contrasted with the proud and insolent unbelief of the men of Nazareth, was the behaviour of these poor single-minded fishermen. So rejoiced were they at the summons, that they immediately threw aside their nets, quitted their father, and followed Jesus. They thus gave the first example of leaving father and mother for Christ's sake. They leaped forth, and immediately took the station assigned to them. Zebedee, with his hirelings, was left to take charge of the boat. His ministry was not suited to the cold and calculating timidity, and perhaps insuperable prejudices of old age. Nor had it any place for the hireling. The free, the generous son, of convertible heart, and disinterested devotion, was its only fit steward. And here he was found. The two brothers attached themselves to their Lord, never again to be separated, in this life, or in the life to come. They were engaged in an occupation least connected with such a call. Their business was in the waters. They were fishers of brutes, and had never dreamed of being fishers of men. But it was heart that Jesus required. The rest he would impart. And their hearts had been warmed with the word of God, which came from his lips. They were now kindled afresh by his preaching, and were prepared to receive his summons, however at variance with their worldly occupation. Christians may here well ask of themselves, whether they be so prepared in heart by his blessed word that they will rise up in an instant at his signal, and follow him ?

or whether they are not more likely to remain, as Zebedee, in the boat of their worldly occupation? whether they will leave their earthly father to serve their heavenly Father? Nor plead a livelihood here against the call of the life to come?

It may, however, be urged, that the notions of James and his companions were carnal. In our Lord they recognised the Messiah under all the worldly prejudices of the Jews of their day. It is needless to deny this. But in what different spirit was it that he obeyed, while the rich and wise of the world refused? to these the power and splendour of the satrapy of a magnificent and victorious king, was at least as tempting as to him. But the Messiah was also, even in their view, to be a spiritual character. And here it was that James apprehended Christ, and that they lost sight of him. Upon his single-minded heart the words of Jesus came without a wind or turning, and his miracles with unblunted efficacy. He looked not to the low estate of Jesus, when he displayed such credentials. These were sufficient to convince him that the dominion of the earth was but a consequence, or indeed companion of such powers. However carnal, therefore, may have been his notions of the nature of this dominion, it was a spiritual view, which directed him to Jesus as its possessor. He accepted the word of God from his lips with all faith and lowliness, while the hearts of the rich and wise were shut up against it by the pride and lust of this world.

In the course of our Lord's ministry, James was chosen, with eleven others, to be an apostle. He received from him on this occasion, and in common

with his brother John, the surname of Boanerges, or son of thunder, to express his zeal and power of preaching, by which the Gospel should be heard through the world like thunder from one end of the sky to the other<sup>1</sup>. And well did the two brothers make good their Master's promise. It is singular that they were the first and the last in their deaths, of all the apostolic college. James shed the first drops of that blood, which has been called the seed of the Church, and John, before his death, in extreme old age, gave to the Church that Gospel, the sound of which has gone forth into all the world, and shall never be silent. With the rest James received from our Lord a commission which was the foretaste and introduction to that which they should have in charge after he had quitted earth. It was limited to the Jew, who resting his faith on the fulfilment of prophecy (and this Jesus was fulfilling) was ready. The Gentile, whose faith must be founded on the death and resurrection of Jesus, was not yet prepared. On this occasion their Master plainly told them what they were to suffer for his name's sake. How powerfully must the recollection of those warnings have afterwards come upon James, and how must the fulfilment of those promises of aid have borne him up against his trials. When Herod was seeking his life, and he "was led before kings and governors" for Christ's sake, how must his memory have been brightened with those comfortable expressions, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not

<sup>1</sup> See the opinions of the Fathers in Suicer, under *βρονη*. That the name was given in rebuke, is inconsistent with the place in St. Mark, where it appears.

able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows<sup>1</sup>." In this short and preparatory mission, his Master's predictions ran not out to the end of their destined course. It was accomplished apparently without much peril, and was gratifying to his yet unspiritualized heart from the miraculous powers with which he was endowed. The thoughts of suffering therefore passed away, while those of enjoying were confirmed. Shortly after this happened the death of John the Baptist, giving a striking illustration of what Jesus had predicted of his own preachers. Yet if this produced an impression on his apostles, and showed them how little they must look to this world for the rewards of their service, it was quickly again obliterated. The splendid scene of the transfiguration, soon following, fixed their eyes so intently upon their Master's glory, that they were ever after, even up to his death, unprepared for his sufferings: much more so, therefore, for their own. A striking example of this blindness occurs on the occasion of Jesus taking them up with him to Jerusalem for the last time. He distinctly told them that he was to suffer and die, detailing the very circumstances, and yet they could not understand. So far from it, that the two sons of Zebedee allowed their mother to request of him, that they may sit, the one on his right hand, and the other on his left in his

<sup>1</sup> Matthew x. 28.

kingdom. To the solemn question of Jesus, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They fearlessly answered, We can. They little conceived of the contents of that cup, and of the element of that baptism. They thought that he was going up to take possession of his kingdom, in which his apostles should sit on twelve thrones, and their ambition was to occupy the most honourable of these. Yet how nobly did they afterwards make good their promise. They joyfully drank of the cup of the bitterness of sorrow to the dregs, and willingly underwent the baptism of the fire of persecution. Unflinchingly they followed the track which was wet with their Master's blood, and meekly gave themselves up to indignity and shame, submitting to every humiliation for his sake, and after his example. As their heavenly King and Master took the form of a servant, so they, the ministers of his kingdom, waited, like the veriest slaves, upon fellow-man, like slaves suffered stripes and ill-treatment, yet laboured cheerfully on, unweariedly ministering to his spiritual necessities, and patiently bearing all, if they could but win him to Christ, and make him a partaker of the ransom which had been paid for man. It is indeed most instructive to compare the weakness and blindness of their former state with the strength and clear-sighted wisdom of their latter. In one person we see two different men, the carnal, and the spiritual. The carnal at first supreme. Then a short struggle, in which the Holy Ghost descends to decide the combat, and then the spiritual in triumphant dominion. Our Lord's words, therefore, addressed to his apostles on

their future sufferings, to the sense of which they were as yet carnally blind, come upon our ears in the shape of most consoling prophecies. We acknowledge our own worldly-mindedness, as we hear them, in the example of his hearers, and we see also the joyful hope of our own future amendment in the utter change of those listless hearers into patient sufferers, and active doers of those things of which they had had so little understanding. How little did these brothers, who were for calling down fire from heaven on the Samaritans, think what spirit they should be of hereafter, and that their most blissful occupation would be calling down upon their gainsayers the heavenly fire of the Holy Ghost.

Together with his brother and Peter, James was admitted into the house to witness the resurrection of Jairus's daughter. In this instance, as in that of the raising of the son of the widow of Nain, he was witness to the actual change from death to life. The very interval, which in the case of Lazarus, and his own Master, was hidden from sight, was here exhibited before him. What a spectacle was this to think upon in after-days, when he was dying daily, under the hands of persecutors and false brethren. All the miraculous changes from death to life, so astonishing to the sight, so striking upon the heart of mortal man, took place, before his eyes, at the command of Jesus. How little must he have recked of threats and wrongs from his countrymen, how must he have laughed to scorn the sword of Herod, who had the life-giving Saviour thus before him, who had this substantial foretaste of the resurrection on the last day. Faith is the hope

of things not seen. Here, then, was more than mere faith. He had seen in others. There now remained but to see it in himself.

It was in the same chosen company too, sitting upon Mount Olivet, that he heard the awful denunciation against Jerusalem go forth from his Master's lips. What a contradiction was this to his carnal notion that Jerusalem should be the capital of the Messiah's kingdom, and imperial Rome should shrink before it into a provincial town. Yet when these tremendous words rose up in the memory of his spiritualized mind, with what boldness would they inspire him. Herod and his satellites, the high-priest and all his ghostly train of adversaries to the Gospel of Christ, were mere shadows, quickly to pass away, and be lost for ever. He with the small flock of Christ were the only realities; they might kill his body, which shared with them a shadowy stay, but they could not kill his soul, which was with Christ. The very persecutions which he endured were a token of the fast-coming accomplishment of this prediction, and ushered in the time of the completion of the spiritual temple, which built upon the ruins of that of timber and stones, should last for ever. He was exchanging the earthly Jerusalem for the heavenly, a country devoted to destruction, for a country of bliss and eternity.

The last occasion on which James shared with his brother and Peter the especial communion of his Master, was when he was admitted as a witness to his agony in the garden. Here he saw the unutterable anguish of a sinless being about to undergo the wages of sin. He saw him in earnest prayer to the

father, and the sweat of his agony falling to the ground like drops of blood. But he and his fellows, weary with anxiety and watching, fell asleep amid the indescribable spectacle. But, after he had been enlightened by the Holy Ghost, and entirely comprehended his Master's nature, then he could appreciate the horror, the loathing, which his sinless Master must have experienced in the idea of encountering this contact, as it were, with sin, this shock to the nature of his immortal being at undergoing mortality. He had already dearly loved his Master, what must now have been his love, how heartily must he have embraced, as a most blessed and precious gift from him, every occasion of expressing it, and affording its overwhelming tide a vent through doing or suffering for his sake. And how insignificant must have appeared every suffering which could befall himself on the comparison with the sufferings of which he witnessed the outward tokens in him. He must have hailed any affliction as a message from him, and as bringing him back personally to his mind. It was one of his means of communion with him, and from the depth of this he could appreciate the height of glory which he should be called to share hereafter.

He shortly entered into that glory. Ten years was the brief space allotted to his preaching, and to his suffering. That he should be singled out thus by Herod as an object of vengeance in his persecution of the infant Church, is a proof of his pre-eminent zeal. That his death so pleased the Jews, shows how boldly he asserted the freedom of the spirit of the Gospel, against their bondage of the

dead letter. Perhaps he may have mingled up with his exhortations to repentance, awful warnings of the approaching destruction, and goaded thus to madness the worldly self-righteousness and pride of his countrymen. It is remarkable that the brunt of persecution came upon the three favourite disciples of Jesus. Their more intimate knowledge of him at once supplied them with a more abundant store of that which would provoke the wrath of the Jew, and also inspired them with greater boldness. As they were greater in his love, so would they be, in every way, greater in their hatred. The circumstances of his death are very briefly told. Scripture merely says that he was put to death by the sword. Ancient tradition, as preserved by Eusebius<sup>1</sup>, informs us that the person who had brought him to trial, upon seeing him give his testimony to Jesus, was so moved, as on the spot to profess himself a Christian. On this they were led away together to execution. Thus this blessed martyr fulfilled to the Lord his promise of drinking of the cup of which he had drunk, and of being baptized with the baptism that he had been baptized with. He was not, indeed, the first soldier of Christ that had fallen, but he was the first of the leaders that was slain in conducting the victorious fight against the world under the banner of the cross, and, like the proto-martyr Stephen, is distinguished by having received his death, not as others, at the hands of the heathen, but, after the pattern of the great Captain of Salvation himself, at the hands of his own countrymen.

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. H. E. ii. 10.

His labours having been confined to them, and his death occurring thus early, we have no particulars of the labours of his apostleship. But although the record of them be lost on earth, they are registered in heaven. He thus stands at the head of a band of faithful servants of Christ, who in obscurity of station, or remoteness of situation, have cheerfully and unweariedly done his work, not thinking of the applause of men, but looking only to the approbation of God and their Saviour, not moved by self-love, but by love towards God and man. They died, and none regarded them. The memory of them is vanished from earth. They figure in no catalogue of saints. They are honoured with no ostentatious biography. Their example stands not before the reverent gaze of posterity. But their work was well done, and its effects are found by every one who has since worked in the same vineyard. Its fruits are glowing there, and unseen though they be to the fleshly eye of the visible Church, are a delightful contemplation to the spiritual eye of the invisible. There they still diffuse that joy which prevails among the angels of heaven over every sinner which repenteth. When the great day of account shall come, how different will the register kept in heaven be from that kept by frail man upon earth. How different the lists of glory and of shame. How many will unfold a dazzling history of whom the world now knows nothing; how many will emerge into visible glory, who were content to pass, together with their labours of love, into man's utter oblivion; who for the glory of their Master shrank from earthly fame, and despising all the gifts of the glory of this fleeting

world, looked on with patient hope to the glory of the everlasting world to come. To forego that love of fame, which has been so justly styled, "the last infirmity of noble minds," to sacrifice worldly reputation to unworldly interests, this is the greatest trial of all, in this path, beyond all others, is set the stumbling-block of the cross. It is overgrown and concealed by the rank and gay weeds of this world. Against this grand incitement to carnal action our Saviour especially warns us. It never can prompt real spiritual action; as well may mortality beget immortality, and sin be father to innocence. To the man who looks forward to everlasting life in Christ Jesus, all between sinks into a gulf. The day of the Son of man is before his eyes. What therefore recks he of the day of man<sup>1</sup>?

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 3.

## ST. PETER.

A. D. 68.

OF all the disciples of our Lord, Peter presents to us a life the most instructive. Its detail is ample, his character is thrown prominently forward, and is distinctly marked. Simplicity of mind and ardour of temper are its chief features. Hence resulted both his devotion to his Master, and his abandonment of him; his retention of Jewish prejudices, and his casting them off; an abundance of courage of the heart, but a deficiency of that of the mind. His unsuspecting impetuosity hurried him into professions which he could not keep, and his frankness and good feeling prompted a ready and sincere repentance. His is a character the very frailties of which win us over. They excite our sympathy, while his virtues command our respect. Even in his regenerate state its main features are seen, and immediately start forth when he comes into contact with the zealous and influential Paul.

He was brought up in an occupation better suited to innocence of life than most. He was a fisherman in the waters of the beautiful sea of Genesareth, and must have had his courage sometimes put to the proof by the violent storms which suddenly plunge down from the encircling mountains upon the

lake. Bethsaida, on its western shore, was his native place. While thus employed with Andrew his brother, the fame of the preaching of John the Baptist reached him. The two brothers joined the immense crowds which flocked to hear him, and listen to the proclamation of the kingdom of the Messiah. Andrew enrolled himself among his disciples, and was honoured by him with the revelation of the Messiah in Jesus. He and his brother Peter immediately attached themselves to Jesus, and were chosen among his apostles. Among these his name is ever placed first, however the order of the others may vary, and on all occasions he appears as the foreman and spokesman of the body. When Jesus, rejected at Nazareth, had determined to make the neighbourhood of the sea of Gennesareth the chief scene of his preaching, he took up his abode in the house of Peter, which was now at Capernaum, a considerable town on the northern shore. Hence he oftentimes crossed the lake to the other shore. It was on one of these occasions that Peter exhibited a very lively mark of his character. Jesus had despatched his disciples forward in the ship on their return to Capernaum. Himself staid the evening and night on a lonely mountain, engaged in prayer. In the fourth watch of the night, which would be between three and six in the morning, he followed them walking on the sea. The disciples were affrighted at the supernatural sight, especially as the sea was now exceedingly rough. They cried out through fear. Jesus cried to them, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." Peter, whose courage was high, and faith in his Master unbounded, answered and said, "Lord

if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." The Lord bade him, and he walked a little way. But shortly the roughness of the waves and boisterousness of the wind frightened him. He lost his resolution and his faith, and beginning to sink cried, "Lord save me." Jesus gently rebuking his want of faith, caught him and took him into the boat. This incident is quite a foreshadowing of his denial, and should have taught him how weak he was, and deterred him from those rash professions into which his ardent temper was hurrying him. But in this point Peter has left many successors. We are every day making professions to Jesus, which we are unable to maintain in the hour of trial. In our overweening confidence, which we mistake for a steady faith, we will plunge into the venture of perilous experiment, we will, in the heat of the moment, overlook or despise all lets and hindrances. We will set at nought the persuasion and dissuasion of friends, the intrusions on our comfort, the jeopardy of our person, our fortune, our rank, our reputation. We will look boldly on this stormy sea, and confidently proclaim that we go to meet Jesus. But when our feet touch this rolling sea, when our garments are wet with its furious spray, when its billows begin to curl over our head, then our confidence, and with it, our faith, is fled. We begin to sink, and cry out, "Lord, save me." Happy we, if we have him near at hand, as having ever followed him like Peter, so that we may be taken up again into the ship of his blessed apostles.

But the generous apostle very shortly nobly redeemed this momentary frailty, and took his station

at the head of his brethren in devotion to his Master. Well did he realize the omen of the name Cephas, or Peter, which that Master had given him. A large defection of his disciples took place. They had been offended at the words of Jesus, which were too spiritual for their carnal comprehension. Then he said to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Simon Peter answered him and said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." The same profession he made on a second occasion, and received in return a charge of such dignity as never before was given to man. Jesus had been preaching throughout Galilee, and was now in Judea. His miracles and his doctrine persuaded all men that he was a great prophet at least, and since the Messiah was now anxiously looked for, they supposed that he was his harbinger. In order to try his disciples, Jesus put the question to them, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" and they said, "Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." He said unto them. "But whom say ye that I am?" And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered and said unto him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee that thou art Peter: and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt

bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven : and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." Memorable, indeed, are these words in the history of the Church, and cannot be passed over without remark. Space will allow only of the following. Christ's question was addressed to *all* his disciples, and therefore Peter, as their spokesman and representative, answers for all. To *all*, therefore, represented in him is Christ's promise of the power of the keys made ; and this view is confirmed by another passage in which it is made to the whole college of apostles. Again, the apostles on being asked, enumerate the various opinions entertained by various persons concerning his character. But these are all false opinions. Peter then propounds the true, and Jesus says, this it is on which, as a rock (alluding to the propounder's name) I found my Church. This is its cardinal article on which every thing hinges. Fixed upon this, my Church shall never be unsettled, and to you I commit all authority in it, to admit and expel, to absolve sins, and to retain them.

Still Peter shared with his countrymen the carnal notions of the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, nor could he persuade himself to admit of his Master's continued admonitions of what was going to happen, of his suffering even unto death. When he gave them a thought, he perhaps referred to the example of Elias, who suffered indeed persecution, but finished with a glorious and miraculous triumph. This seems the key both to his conduct and to that of his companions. An occasion soon occurred which prompted his sanguine spirit to think that all had

been undergone, and the blissful reward arrived. He saw his Master transformed into heavenly glory, and attended by Moses and Elias in their glorified state. He did not hear their conversation concerning the death of his Master. Indeed, nothing was farther from his thoughts at this moment than death. He wished to detain and fix down for earthly enjoyment the beatific vision. Lord ! it is good for us to be here, he cried in fond exultation. If thou wilt, let us build here three tabernacles, one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias : not knowing what he said. He thought to keep these heavenly guests upon earth as Abraham did the three angels. He thought that a law should go hence as from Mount Sinai. That his Master should reign in glory on the throne of this holy mount, with Moses and Elias as chief councillors, and himself and the eleven as Satraps. The voice proceeding from the bright cloud, " This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased ; hear ye him," while it flung him prostrate to earth in fearful amazement and adoration, yet confirmed the notion which he had entertained. The vision vanished, and all returned to its former earthly state. Jesus resumed his lowliness, and his glorious company had left the mountain.

Yet Peter could not so readily dismiss it from his mind. It was too much in harmony with his worldly imagination and desires. Its effects are clearly traceable in his subsequent conduct. His rash confidence increased, and in proportion his real faith diminished. He was less able to abide the trial of the contrast of a scene of the deepest humiliation with that of exceeding glory. His Master,

who knew the workings of his heart, and who loved him, took occasion to warn him beyond all the others. Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem lighted up afresh the fiery confidence of Peter, and his Master redoubled his warnings. On one of their daily walks, during the last week of his earthly sojourn, from Bethany, Jesus cursed a barren fig-tree. Next morning, as they passed again that way, Peter beheld it withered. He remarked this to Jesus, who answered, "have faith in God," and proceeded to show its wonderful efficacy. But Peter noted none of these significant hints, and the nearer the hour of his trial approached the more confident he became. That hour now approached. They had finished the last supper which they were to take together, and Jesus walked with his apostles towards the Mount of Olives. On the way he warned them of the stumbling-block which was now at their very feet. "All ye shall be offended in me because of this night," said he, "for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered." Peter would not submit in silence and resignation to this sad prediction. He answered, with the somewhat angry feeling of one whose unshaken fidelity is unjustly distrusted, "Although all should be offended, yet will not I." Jesus said unto him, "Verily I say unto thee, that this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." But he spake the more vehemently, "If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise." Peter here committed the sad mistake, which has been so often committed since in the Church, that his trial would be one of personal courage. He was

prepared for a battle, and indeed commenced one in his Master's defence, wounding with his sword one of the high-priest's servants. But he was not prepared to see that Lord, whom he had beheld in glory, standing as a criminal at the bar of the high-priest, to see him arraigned before the spiritual head of his nation. What a scene for a zealous believing Jew—Jesus and the high-priest confronted! what a scene for him that believed in Jesus as the Christ—Jesus the irresistible, the victorious King of all earth, awaiting his sentence from the mouth of the high-priest! It was in this moment of inextricable perplexity, of stupifying amazement, that the enemy tempted Peter in the servants of the high-priest's house. Thrice was he attacked with the charge, "Thou wast also with Jesus of Galilee," and thrice, and each time with greater vehemence, he denied all knowledge of him. And immediately the cock crew. Then it was that the Lord turned round, and looked earnestly on Peter. All his affectionate admonition, all his gentle repulsion of his rash protestations came at once into Peter's mind, and overwhelmed him with sorrow and shame. He went out, and wept bitterly.

Such was the first denial of Christ in his Church. It took place in the chief of the apostles, as if to make the warning more awful. And it arose from a vain confidence, reposing on a carnal view of the blessed Gospel. From the same origin have arisen all the denials which have since taken place. The denier has taken up some notion which has indulged his pride, or delighted his imagination, or perhaps even served his interest. These have puffed him up with overweening confidence. But where, alas, is

the faith in God? On these he has been ready to fight for his Master, and gladly would handle the weapons of flesh in his defence. But when the fight has proved to be purely spiritual, when he has found those worldly notions all contradicted, when he has seen that Saviour, whose service he so well reconciled with the world, brought to the bar of the world, and condemned in the person and the doctrines of his servants, when patience and long-suffering are before him, instead of gallant and admired energy, then his support is gone, and he falls as Peter did. How many a martyr (in his own imagination) has come to this sorrowful end.

Peter vanishes from our sight in the Scripture narrative from this sad moment until the joyful morning of the resurrection. It must have been an interval of surpassing anguish, self-reproach, and shame. His single mind, and his generous temper laid him open to an overwhelming flood of remorse. Self-convicted, and self-condemned, he, perhaps, hid himself from sight, until the women brought to him the angel's message, that the Lord was risen. Immediately he ran in company with John to the sepulchre, and went into it, and found it empty. The Lord himself appeared to him afterwards, affording him an earnest of forgiveness, by thus distinguishing him from the rest. His full forgiveness was soon after pronounced in a solemn manner. Never was penitent so completely restored, never in a more glorious congregation. The Lord himself in person, and from his own lips pronounced his absolution. The glorious company of the apostles formed the congregation. They, indeed, had no

reason to boast. They did not positively deny their Master, because (with the exception of John) they had not Peter's courage to stay. They fled. Accordingly, in Peter's restitution, they must have included also their own. It was on the shore of the lake of Gennesareth that this took place, and Peter was found in that very occupation from which he had been called to the apostleship, and recognized the Lord in a similar miraculous draught. As Peter had thrice denied him, Jesus now drew forth from him three successive declarations of his love, and after every declaration gave him a charge to feed his sheep. He then foretold to him the manner in which he should glorify God by his death. Thus Peter had every mark given him of his Master's restored confidence. He was more than reinstated. He had a charge of love and duty given him for every denial.

In a short time after this, the Holy Ghost came down upon him, and his companions, and he was the first to preach the glad tidings of the Gospel to the world. So effectual was his preaching, that his hearers were pricked in their hearts, and cried, "What shall we do to be saved?" On that day were gathered the first-fruits of the Church, in the conversion of three thousand souls to the belief in Jesus as the Christ. His eyes were, indeed, now opened. He now knew Christ as he was. The Holy Ghost had enlightened his sight, and informed his heart. He was no longer the ambitious satrap of an earthly throne, but a preacher of the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven. He no longer wielded an earthly sword in his Master's cause, but the sword of

the Spirit. The sufferings from which he before shrank as uncongenial with the glorious calling of the Messiah, he now most cheerfully embraced as his distinguishing attribute. And as he was called upon first to preach, so was he also first to suffer. A few days after the feast of Pentecost, he went up with John to the Temple. On entering, a cripple begged alms of them. Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Christ Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk." He was immediately restored. The miracle quickly drew a great crowd around them in Solomon's porch, and Peter took the opportunity of preaching Christ to them, in whose most holy and powerful name this miracle had been done. Him he said, whom they had put to death, God had glorified. He admitted, however, the excuse of their ignorance up to this moment. But henceforward it would be no longer available. The prophecies were fulfilled manifestly before their eyes. And to them, as children of the prophets and of the covenant, was Jesus first sent and preached. He had proceeded thus far, when he was interrupted by the priests and captain of the Temple, whom the Sadducees, alarmed at the preaching of the resurrection of the dead in Jesus, had instigated. Still what had been already said had so good effect, that very many believed, so that the numbers of the infant Church now amounted to five thousand. The exceeding apprehension of the Jews shows how powerful was now the effect on the people of the miracles and preaching of the apostles. Peter and John were brought next morning before the Sanhedrim. And in them was first verified their

Master's prediction, that they should be brought before governors and councils for his name's sake, and in them too was realized the promised gift of a mouth and wisdom, which all their adversaries were not able to gainsay nor resist. Before that very high-priest, with whom he had seen his Master confronted, he now stood. But no longer the confounded, the denying Peter. He stood as the apostle of the ever-living Lord of glory before an empty shadow, before the obsolete type of the one and only Mediator with the Father, whom he had seen, whom he had felt, and whom he now preached. When demanded by what power or by what name this miracle had been done, Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, fearlessly announced to this assembly of the great and wise of his own nation the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and told them that the stone which they the builders had set at nought had become the head-stone of the corner: that in him and in no other was there salvation. At such an address from unlearned and ignorant men the members of the council were exceedingly astonished. They recognized them as followers of Jesus, and seeing the man whom they had cured they had nothing to say. They were in extreme perplexity. They were afraid lest harsh conduct should only attract still greater attention of the people, to whom it was vain to deny the miracle. They were obliged to be content with commanding them, under severe threats, not to preach any more in the name of Jesus. The apostles plainly told them that they could not obey. Nevertheless, the rulers only reiterated their threats and dismissed them. They were received with extreme joy by the Church, which, having had its first

taste of persecution, now also enjoyed for the first time the exceeding happiness of the patience which it works, and of the joy which it brings of suffering for Christ's sake. It burst forth into its first triumphal hymn, sang its first song of victory over the baffled gates of hell and defeated powers of darkness, and left a model for future songs of deliverance to be sung to the end of the world. When they had finished, the house shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and spake the word of God with boldness.

But at this very moment there were unsound members in the Church, and Peter was called upon to denounce the first offender. The single-mindedness of Peter revolted from the double-dealing of the wretched Ananias, and displayed itself in the same strong expression of offended purity, as afterwards in the case of Simon Magus. He exhibits a stern majesty, a deep sense of the insult offered to the Holy Spirit, as he solemnly lays before the offender the enormity of his transgression, and calls him, and his miserable wife after him, to account before the face of the Church. The example was awful, but most useful; and numbers continued to swell the Church: while Peter and his colleagues proceeded on their work of preaching, confirming it by many miracles, insomuch, that multitudes flocked in from the country with their sick, and all were healed. The Sanhedrim was now filled both with fear and indignation. It determined upon bold measures, and seized and put into confinement the whole college of apostles. But what was their surprise and perplexity, when on the next morning they would have them brought before

them, and the officers informed them that their cells were empty, and yet the doors unlocked and the sentinels standing before them, unconscious of their escape. The angel of the Lord had delivered them during the night, and commanded them to go and teach in the Temple. There they were found at their post, and brought, but without violence (for fear of the people), to the council. In answer to their charge of disobedience to their orders, Peter at the head of his colleagues boldly answered, that they should obey God rather than man, and proceeded fearlessly to preach Jesus as the Saviour, the author of repentance and forgiveness to Israel. So enraged was the council at this, that it was proceeding to put them to death, when Gamaliel advised gentler measures. And by his advice, having first beaten them, they let the apostles go, reiterating their charge not to speak in the name of Jesus.

Persecution now became severe. The first martyr had fallen, and Saul was haling men and women to prison. Still the word of God prevailed, and the Church grew. Its preachers were scattered, and scattered the word as they went. Even the schismatic Samaria, which refused anything at the hand of the Jew, accepted the Gospel at their hands. When news of this was brought to the church at Jerusalem, it appointed Peter and John to go down to Samaria, and complete the work of Philip, who had converted them. Here Peter first encountered Simon Magus, who seeing the effects of the Holy Ghost, communicated by the imposition of Peter's hands, and deeming the power to be communicable like that of working the tricks of his own magic, offered money

to Peter for the gift of such power. "Thy money perish with thee, because thou thoughtest the gift of God may be purchased with money," is the indignant reply of the single-minded and generous Peter, who further warned him to repentance and peace with God. It were well if what has from this occasion been designated 'simony' had been the only plague-spot of which we see the first example in Simon. But he is the predecessor of all those who allow worldly motives to suggest what they do in the name of Christ, or seek the benefits of the Gospel from the instigation of a corrupt heart. He is the predecessor of all hypocrites and self-deluders.

Peter was still at Jerusalem, when the Church was presented with a most unexpected labourer in its service. Saul, in the fourth year after his miraculous conversion, went up to Jerusalem for the especial purpose of being acquainted and conferring with Peter, the apostle of the circumcision. The memory of the late persecution was too fresh to allow the disciples to accept his advances. Barnabas, however, took him by the hand, and introduced him to the apostles Peter, and James the son of Alphaeus. He staid fifteen days with Peter. It is delightful to contemplate this conference of two such ardent and energetic apostles. How must Peter have been overjoyed at the accession of such an associate in the labours of the Gospel, so zealous and yet so discreet, so bold, and yet so patient. And how must Paul have hung upon the lips of Peter, as he detailed to him his own personal intercourse with the Lord of life. How spiritual must

have been their converse. When, before, or since, were life and death, and sin, and the powers of the world to come, so canvassed, and by such men. When did two men meet with hopes so high, so holy, and on a work which should change not only the institutions, but the very heart, yea, and the very lot of man among God's creatures, now and for ever. How earnest must have been their mutual prayer, how continual their mutual edification, what an outpouring of the Spirit upon all their communication. Thus they met for the first time, and when they met for the last, it was to glorify God, whose Gospel had been the work of their lives; in their deaths; even then they were not divided.

Henceforward St. Peter's appearance at Jerusalem seems to have been but occasional. St. James alone was left in constant residence, having the superintendence of the church there committed to him. Peter extended the range of his preaching far and wide. He passed throughout all quarters, and so came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. Here he turned many to the Lord by miraculously healing the paralytic Æneas, and again at Joppa, by restoring Tabitha to life. At this latter place he made his abode some time, and this abode forms a celebrated epoch in the history of the church. While he was sojourning here, Cornelius a centurion, dwelling at Cesarea, who feared God with all his house, was warned in a divine vision to send for Peter, who should tell him what he ought to do. Peter was in like manner prepared to receive the message. Although Jesus had commanded his apostles to go unto the whole world, and preach the

Gospel to every creature, yet to a Jew this need mean no more than to preach it to the Jews or their proselytes, who were scattered over the face of the earth, to the 'Dispersion' as it was therefore called; that Peter so understood it, appears from his own address to the house of Cornelius<sup>1</sup>, and that it was generally so understood, appears from the blame which he incurred from the brethren at Jerusalem in consequence of this transaction<sup>2</sup>. Judaism was therefore, according to the present notion of the church, to be the only door to Christianity.

To enlarge this narrow view, God sent Peter a vision, in which were presented to him a multitude of unclean creatures, let down from heaven in a sheet by the four corners, while a voice came to him saying, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat," and this was repeated three times; the meaning Peter did not at first comprehend. But he immediately recognised it when the message arrived from Cornelius, and God set his seal to the interpretation, when at the preaching of Peter to Cornelius and his friends, the Holy Ghost fell upon all which heard the word, Gentiles though they were, to the great astonishment of the circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter. Upon God so signally manifesting his acceptance of them as clean, and clean not merely through bodily distinctions and observances, but through spiritual endowments, they were immediately admitted by Peter through baptism into his church. In our Gentile calendar this is indeed a glorious day. Never had there been such since our last

<sup>1</sup> Acts x. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Ib. xi. 3.

common ancestor Noah touched the ground after the flood. We were once more gathered under one head, and represented as living, and not dead in trespasses and sin, before God. We emerged from darkness and the shadow of death into the light and life of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The wall of partition was thrown down between us poor outcasts of the court of the temple, in which the Jew was enjoying exclusive spiritual bliss. The sorrowful and plaintive strain of distant hope, "Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not<sup>1</sup>," was turned into a song of possession of joy, of recognition, of reconciliation, and acceptance. On this day was fulfilled the promise to Adam, and to Abraham, and the mystery which had been hidden from the beginning of the world was unveiled. We cry out in joyful faith, "Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer: thy name is from everlasting<sup>2</sup>." The spiritual Abraham is acquainted with us, the true Israel acknowledges us. With all the glowing delight and generous thankfulness of the inheritors of the high privileges and riches of our forefathers, we can place ourselves as present at this glorious scene of the building of our eternal fortune. Peter, and Cornelius, and Cesarea, should be to us household words of joy, recalling a scene of exceeding triumph and gladness. This day is our birthday, Peter our father, Cornelius our firstborn brother, Cesarea our birth-place.

The great work was now done, the Redeemer's charge to preach the Gospel to every creature was

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah lxiii. 16.

<sup>1</sup> Ib.

fulfilled in spirit, and Scripture here closes the history of Peter as foreman of the apostolic college. Having sanctified the first fruits, he left the harvest to be gathered by the zealous Paul, and returned to his charge of the circumcision<sup>1</sup>. At Jerusalem he gave an account to the church of this calling of the Gentiles, which silenced his scrupulous adversaries, and caused all to glorify God, in that he had granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life. During his sojourn here arose a second persecution of the church. Herod, who was now very industriously, and for very good worldly reasons, courting popularity with the Jews, took this as one of the surest means. He began with putting James the brother of John to death, and seeing how much they were gratified with this, he went on to lay hold of Peter also. Perhaps his late transactions with the Gentiles had exasperated against him in particular the hatred of the bigotted Jews. He would also be marked out as chief of the apostles. He was thrown into prison to await his trial, which could not come on until after the passover had been ended. It was at such a season that his blessed Master had suffered before him. How bright then must have been his prison hours, how joyful the prospect of suffering for his sake. How intimate and how blissful his communion with him, who having been perfected by suffering, had become the Captain of Salvation, and would bring him unto glory. He was watched with more than common care. The wondrous deliverance which had already

<sup>1</sup> Gal. ii. 7.

attended the Christians determined their enemies to omit no possible precaution. He was therefore guarded by successive watches, each of four men, two without and two within the cell. But like the seal and guard of his Lord's tomb, such precautions only magnified God's work. The bolts and bars of man have never excluded the visits of angels. In the midst of the night an angel of the Lord came to him, loosed his chains, and led him through bolted doors out of the prison. Staying only to announce his deliverance to the brethren who were met at Mary's house, he quitted Jerusalem, and went to sojourn at Cesarea.

A most important question recalled him to Jerusalem. He had, by God's order, opened the door to the Gentiles, and they eagerly flocked in. But Jewish prejudice, but imperfectly subdued, opposed to them, after their entry, another door still. The stricter Jews, who were of the Pharisaic sect, maintained that without the law was no salvation; that God having set up this means had never abrogated it; that therefore the Gentiles, having been accepted by him, were bound to adopt the law, for that within its inclosure alone were the faithful confined. According to this doctrine the Gentiles found, to their miserable disappointment, that they had but exchanged one burden for another. They had expected to find deliverance not only from all their fears, and doubts, and sins, but also from the burden of superstitious ceremonial. Yet were they now to be saddled by a far more strict and punctilious ceremonial, which from their infancy they had been taught to despise. The debate arose

in the church of Antioch, to which a vast accession of Gentiles had been brought by the exertions of Paul and Barnabas, who laboured for a whole year in the work. It was certainly now a point to be considered how far even the Jews themselves were obliged, as Christians, to conformity with the law. It seemed to have a claim on them as long as they were in Judea, but no where else. In Judea they were bound to a great part of it, as the law of the land. And the great festivals, although, as having now lost their typical character, they had become unmeaning, or rather gave a wrong meaning, yet as national commemorations of great mercies, were still proper objects of their observance. Neither had God as yet formally abrogated the law, as he did afterwards, when he gave up the temple to destruction, without the voice of a single prophet to announce its restoration. Hence we find that the apostles, while in Judea, strictly observed the law; but when at Antioch Peter dispensed with its strictness; but the Gentiles could in no place be bound by it. By the accomplishment of its typical part, it was now reduced to a mere national law, which it would be tyrannous to impose upon foreigners. Circumcision gave right of inheritance in the promised land, with which the Gentile had nothing to do. If he once admitted it, he was immediately obnoxious to the whole. In fact it was a struggle between Christianity and Judaism, for had the law of Moses been conjoined with the Gospel, its carnality must have quickly overlaid the spirituality of its partner, and finally extinguished it. Nor could the Gospel, while thus clogged, make any sensible progress

among the heathen. All that it had inviting was hidden beneath the disgusting and despised dress of Judaism. While neither party gave way, a schism was inevitable. They could not meet to eat and drink at the Lord's Supper: self-denial was called for from both parties; charity required of the Jew to abate his scruples about meats and drinks and washings, which were now, and in a foreign land, unreasonable: and it required of the Gentiles to forego all those practices, which however harmless and indifferent to himself, yet were inseparably connected in a Jewish mind with idolatrous uncleanness. To settle this vital question, Paul and Barnabas were deputed to go up to Jerusalem, and lay it before the Assembly of the Apostles and Elders. On this was held the first Christian Council: its decree would decide whether Christianity should be but a short-lived sect of Judaism, or the religion of all civilized nations to the end of the world. After the debate had proceeded to some length, Peter rose up, referring to his heavenly vision, and appealing to them how, because of it, he had preached the Gospel to the heathen, and testifying how God himself had made no distinction between them and the Jew, but had shed his clean and holy Spirit upon them as he had upon him, had taken them as clean, through faith, and not through circumcision; he called it a tempting of God, a resistance to his signified will, to put them, after such manifestations, under the intolerable yoke of the law. He proposed, however, no positive plan. This was left for James, who seems to have presided in the council. His plan was adopted, and thus was closed up this breach,

which threatened the very existence of the Church.

The answer of the Council diffused great joy at Antioch, but it was soon damped by St. Peter himself, the spiritual father of the uncircumcision. When he first arrived amongst them, he ate with them without scruple, making no distinction of legal cleanness and uncleanness. But after certain members of the Church of Jerusalem had arrived, men holding fast to the strict distinctions of the law, Peter gave way before their violence, and withdrew himself from communion with the Gentiles. He had not yet surmounted his natural deficiency of moral courage, and, bold and generous though he was, he had neither the expanse of comprehension, nor the firmness of mental resolve with which Paul was so highly gifted. This conduct was undoing all the good which the decree of the Church was intended to effect; the example of the chief of the apostles on the very spot had more authority than the resolutions of a distant Council. St. Paul was fortunately at hand to check the mischief. None but he was capable of the proper resistance. Fearing God, and not man, he withstood Peter to the face, and severely rebuked him for such concessions to principles which he himself had by open example disavowed, and which were so pregnant with mischief. How can you, he said, who have yourself lived as a heathen, insist upon the Law of Moses? If justification be by the works of the law, you have yourself forfeited it, and made Christ the minister of sin. Peter recovered his natural single-mindedness upon this rebuke. But the whole account shows that his proper

sphere was the apostleship of the circumcision. He was not equal to the peculiar difficulties which perplexed the preaching to the Gentiles. Paul, a man full of Jewish and Gentile learning, endowed with a most comprehensive intellect, with inextinguishable ardour of mind, with instant decision, and with untameable spirit, as well as unwearied patience, was the vessel which God chose for this work.

Henceforward, as far as scriptural information guides us, St. Peter is lost to our sight. From his first Epistle we gather that he had with him at that time Silvanus and Mark; but whether the place whence he writes be really Babylon, or allegorically Rome, is not easily determined. In it he maintains his character as the apostle of the circumcision, addressing it to the dispersion in Asia Minor. His second Epistle lets us into still fewer particulars. All we learn is, that he was sensible of the near approach of his death, and was going to put off the tabernacle of the flesh, even as the Lord Jesus Christ had showed him, the glory of his Master, which he had witnessed on the Mount, was still blazing before his mental sight, and into that, as a faithful servant, whose work had been well done, he was shortly called to enter. He received the crown of martyrdom at Rome, in the same persecution with Paul, in the year sixty-eight of our Lord.

## ST. JOHN.

A. D. 96.

IT is a striking feature in our blessed Lord's selection of his apostles, that he called two fellowships of brothers, Andrew and Peter, James and John; it expresses a lovely trait of character both in caller and in called. In these it shows how community of blood had grown into community of mind, so that where one went, the other was prepared to go too, even to those unknown realms of spirit to which Jesus called them. In him it declares his exceeding tenderness of heart, and kind sympathy with our good affections. He sanctioned with one call the one mind of the brothers. He might have called one, and left the other amid the crowd of his undistinguished disciples: but he began the concord of the spiritual affections by maintaining that of the natural, and called all mankind into one brotherhood in these brothers. He thought not as the world thinks. In its institutions how jealous is this of brothers. It not unreasonably apprehends their conspiring in interest, and properly fears that in many cases, where the independent judgments of the members of a select body are particularly required, the judgments of two brothers, having grown together by long intercourse, or submitted one to the other by long and insensible influence, will be but as one.

But in founding his apostolic college our Lord laid no worldly foundation : its interests were unworldly, and the spirit which should direct it was the Holy Spirit. To what ill purpose should brothers conspire, where to suffer, and not to enjoy ; to die, and not to live, was their interest ? What harm could result from their ever being of one mind, where to be of one mind now and for ever was the object ? Thus has the Lord of love stamped his seal of express sanction on the bond of brotherhood ; thus has he hallowed on the very threshold of the Gospel all its yearnings of love, all its zeal of unity, all its lively fellow-feeling, and continued in the kingdom of heaven the bonds which were cemented upon earth. Envious indeed was the lot of these brothers. Even among worldlings, pre-eminent happiness seems the lot of brothers who have risen by merit to lofty stations. They seem to come more nearly together from the removal of the crowd between, and to enjoy the uninterrupted and delightful contemplation of each other : their very similarity of fortune becomes a fresh tie of union ; it argues similar qualities, and places them in similar interests. But how poor is the purest of such enjoyment to that which these brothers felt. They rose from similar qualities discerned by their heavenly Master, to the thrones of the kingdom of heaven. They saw in each other the growing loveliness of the edifice of the same Holy Spirit, and they were placed in interests indivisible and everlasting. Nor was theirs the lot to stand at last alone, sorrowfully looking on a brother's empty seat. Their seats were set where they never could be empty.

Of these two pairs of brothers, the most remarkable are Peter of the one, and John of the other. They are the most distinguished members of the whole apostolical college, and their characters stand out in strong contrast to each other. Each most dearly loved his Master, and yet with quite a different kind of love. Peter's was that which would prompt him gladly to die for him ; which would not let a hand come near to harm him if he could help it ; he would stand in front of him as a shield, and turn himself to every motion of the assailant. But John's was that which bade him seek to die with him, his joy lay in his company. Whatever affliction may chance to be in it, there was nothing but certain and insupportable sorrow without it. He clung to his Master's side, and partook with him of every turn and motion ; he would follow him whithersoever he went. Peter's was a soldier's love to his leader, but John's was that which surpasses the love of women. Peter drew his sword to deliver his Master. John stood at the cross and took his last dying words. Peter's love would stir him promptly to obey any request. John's would bid him anticipate it. Peter's noted each outward sign and gesture. John's read the heart. Loves so different meet with a return of a different intimacy of love. And if Peter was first in honour, John was first in affection among the apostles of Jesus. To Peter he said, " Lovest thou me ? feed my sheep ;" but to John he recommended his mother in his last agonies, and acknowledged him as his brother, saying to her, " Woman, behold thy son," and to him, " behold thy mother."

The first occasion on which we meet with

John distinct from the rest, shows how deeply he possessed this love. Jesus at his last meal with them said to his apostles, that one of them should betray him. They looked on each other in much distress, doubting of whom he spake, but not daring to ask. Then Peter, unwilling to put the question himself, as perhaps presuming upon too great liberty, beckoned to John to put it; and John, reclining, as the intimate friend, with his head against his Master's bosom, put it, and obtained the answer. His love is again pre-eminently shown in being the only one who followed his Master to the end. In company with Peter he followed him to the house of the High-priest, and there witnessed his comrade's sad denial. John never could have denied him, he was wrapt up in him, and was prepared by the unconquerable patience, as well as ardour of his love, for every event. But Peter's love was more ardent than patient; he was ill-prepared to show it by passive endurance. This main quality of Christian soldiership he had yet to learn. The minuteness of John's narrative respecting our Lord's appearance before Pilate shows that he was present with him there too; and thus he continued faithful to the end. He never lost sight of the beloved form of his Master, until he was sealed in the tomb. Towards the close of our Lord's ministry, we often find Peter and John associated together, and commencing that peculiar companionship which they seem to have maintained until they were separated by the dispersion of the apostles among the Gentiles. They were drawn together by their Master's preference. Rivalry of merit draws pure and generous minds together in mutual admira-

tion and esteem ; it is the vulgar and ignoble which it separates in envy and dislike. But these had the only lasting bond of all love, the only tie which cannot be loosened by the chances and changes of the body, which the fire of trial cannot consume ; they had the spiritual bond of their Saviour's love. In loving him they loved one another, and in loving one another they felt their love for him. They afford the example of the first Christian friendship, and show its only true source ; of that friendship which is from above, and can no more suffer from what passes below, than the body of an angel sent into our world from heaven. Peter's denial, followed by sincere repentance as it was, did not loosen the bonds of this friendship. John's love towards him would grow in tenderness on this very account. Pity towards a sincere penitent, not only brings back all former affection, but softens still further its nature, and melts all that still remained obdurate in the mass. Accordingly they were again together on the joyful morning of the resurrection, and were the first of the apostles who ascertained that the tomb was emptied of its unearthly guest.

These blessed yokefellows of a yoke which was easy indeed, were shortly after joined together, and set apart from the rest, by our Lord's signifying to them their future fortunes. After that the manner of his death had been foretold to him, Peter, turning round and seeing John, was anxious to know what he had to say concerning his companion also. "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee, follow thou me," was the answer. This was thought at the time to intimate that John should survive to the last day. It was,

however, fulfilled in every sense. John alone of all the apostles lived to see the Lord come in judgment on Jerusalem. Nor was he called away to follow his Master by an untimely death; he was left to live out the course of nature. Often must they have thought of these prophecies of their Master in after-life. The Holy Spirit, which came down upon them, and brought all that he said to their remembrance, with an interpretation of what had been obscure, and the converging events of life, must have given them increasing clearness. Reserved thus by the Lord, how must they have set at nought all the chances of the world; they were especially exempted from their grasp. He himself had appointed to them their course; with what joy and satisfaction would they run it. He had said, "touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm," until the hour that I have appointed for them. Thus they must have felt themselves to be in his hands, with a certainty of grasp, as it were, beyond the consciousness of any of the rest.

They had ever been distinguished beyond the rest, but now this additional peculiarity, this their Master's own yoking of them to the chariot of his coming, made them mutual mates and comrades more than ever. They boldly confronted the Sanhedrim together, and shared the affliction of bonds and scourgings. The prompt ardour of Peter, and the much-enduring mildness of John, were associated in a resistance which defied all the powers of earth to overcome. But we soon lose sight in Scripture narrative of this glorious fellowship; the last occasion on which John is mentioned is his partnership with

Peter on a mission into Samaria, to lay hands and confer the Holy Ghost on the converts there. It was indeed a work in good accord with his character, one which leaves upon us its exact impression ; it was a work of love and grace, such as became the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Few can have read Scripture, and entered into the characters exhibited there, without feeling sorry so soon to part with the only authentic account of John. We wish to dwell long and late on a character so lovely, on one who was loved by the Source of all love, and exhibited by a closer example than all the rest ; his meekness, his mildness, his tender affection. We cannot help feeling a regret that we have no further history of him, over which we may pore, bend over his works of love, and drink in their spirit. The anecdotes preserved of him by writers of the Church are indeed more numerous than all that are recorded of his colleagues, and one is of some length and of much beauty<sup>1</sup>, but bearing marks, as they do here and there, of want of authenticity, and being at all events mere tradition, we cannot cling to them with that feeling of faith, with that excitation of affection, and with that sense of instruction, with which we hang over the detail of Scripture. But our knowledge of him is not confined to the narrative part of Scripture. He is among those, who although dead, yet speak through their writings. It is quite out of the province of this work to go into any particular investigation of these, they can only be noticed as supplying facts, or illustrating his character.

<sup>1</sup> H. E. III. 23.

The Book of Revelations informs us that he was at that time in exile for the word of God, and testimony of Jesus Christ, in the isle of Patmos. This is the only fact respecting himself, and inasmuch as the book is a prophecy put into his mouth, we can scarcely discern any particular marks of his individual character. Yet there is at least one passage which affords an insight into his sweetness of disposition and tenderness of heart. It is where he weeps much at seeing that there was no one found worthy to open the book of prophecy and loose its seals, neither in heaven, nor on earth, nor under the earth. He wept from pity for God's creatures<sup>1</sup>. Here were God's oracles set forth, and none was able to read them. All creation was rebuked, and put to open shame. They knew not God as he challenged them to know. Angels, spirits, and men, were visibly admonished of their imperfection. The whole creation seemed brought into the condition of fallen man, to whom truth had so long been a mystery. How great then was his joy when in the all-prevailing Lamb he recognized his crucified Master, with what a throbbing of exultation did he hear the triumphal hymn sung to his praise by every creature, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. So was this faithful follower of the Lord comforted in his prison-house, and so has this his described vision enlightened the darkness of the prison-houses of martyrs and confessors. In his book they have read how vain is the opposition of cruel man against God, and have recited the hymn of his triumphant saints. Here to

<sup>1</sup> Revelations v. 3.

the glories of the bliss of the new Jerusalem, to the happy assembly of the first-born, to the company of the spirits of just men made perfect, they have raised their eyes in joyful and almost grasping hope from the afflicted and lacerated Church below, from tyrannous and infidel persecutors, from tortured martyrs and suffering saints. If their prison-house reminded them of Patmos, it was comforted by its vision.

But his epistles place his character in the clearest light. They are the very outpouring of pure charity, the very outbreathing of heavenly love. Opening with a solemn commemoration of his conversation with his divine Master while on earth, he proceeds to instances of his surpassing love towards us, shown in the redemption of the world, and thence deduces the necessity of our returning his love by obedience, and warns his readers against the busy perverters of the truth who were now abroad. This return of love is the very proof of our having passed from death to life. He dwells earnestly on communion with Christ, and the duty of loving him because he first loved us. The epistle is almost an expansion into detail of his Master's charge, "If ye love me keep my commandments." The same strain of divine love pervades the other epistles. Perhaps his peculiar character is never so forcibly brought out before us, as when we compare his writings with those of his comrade Peter. The spirit of their Master's compassionate mercy and loving-kindness dwells in both. But how different is its outward expression. There is an authoritative strain in Peter's style : a beseeching in John's. Peter's is varied in topics, nervous in language, full of his natural impetuosity and fire :

John's is confined to one or two leading ideas, redundant in phrase, and overflowing with sweetness, and simplicity. There is a menacing in the warnings of Peter, a deprecation in the admonitions of John. In the one we plainly discover the character of him who drew the sword for his Master: in the other of him who lay with his head in the bosom of his Master.

The very same character distinguishes his Gospel. The magnificence of his opening soon gives way to the expression of his love, and his narrative runs like a stream through flowery pastures. Its course carries us continually through scenes of winning sweetness. He describes to us the first attachment of his disciples to their Master, and he gives at full length our Lord's valedictory addresses, so overflowing with love. He carefully selects anecdotes which remarkably display the sympathy and love of Jesus, such as the resurrection of Lazarus, and exhibits a most lively delineation of our Lord, by an admirable selection from his sayings and doings, such as could be made only by one who had been continually in his company. Matthew was the only Evangelist who had a similar advantage, and he lets us therefore much more into the individuality of Christ's character, than Mark or Luke, who had only heard of him from others, yet the distinctness with which he figures out our Lord by no means approaches to the striking portrait given by John. We feel that we are indeed reading the narrative of him who lay with his head in his Master's bosom.

This was his last work, being written at Ephesus not long before his death. It was a gift the more

precious to the Church, inasmuch as it discloses to us, in a manner far more open and direct than the rest, the divine attributes of our Saviour, and designedly supplied what fell not within their plan. He was now fast completing a century of life. As he was the youngest, so also he lived the longest of all. Few Christians have been so long in the service of the Church of God upon earth. For seventy years and more he was preaching the word of God and Christ, and exemplifying by his own worldly conversation the extreme loveliness of the true Christian character. He was indeed a fit representative of him whom he preached, of the Lamb of God which shed his blood for the forgiveness of the sins of the world. Meekness, mildness, love, and charity stood most prominent of his Christian graces. He was the last whom the world beheld with the rays, as it were, of Christ's earthly presence remaining upon him. His death, therefore, forms an important epoch in the history of the Church. And his Master blessed him, ere he died with an earnest of the promised victory of the Gospel. He who had stood at his cross, one of a little band of bewildered mourners, lived to see its opprobrious title "Jesus, the King of the Jews," become a name of glory and holy boasting in the mouths of thousands and ten thousands. He lived to hear the sounds of the Gospel re-echoed to him from the furthest corners of earth, while it sounded around him in the most celebrated city of Asia, in the very head-quarters of heathenism, in the most sacred cell of its superstition. There, in its very capital, which was daily thronged and enriched by pilgrims to the great Diana, the pillars of whose

temple were the gifts of kings, in Ephesus itself, he beheld the Church of Christ gradually extending its circle of conquest, and he himself was blessed with the charge of directing the energy of its administration. The beholder of the revelation in spirit was blessed with a sight in the body too, more magnificent than ever prophet's eye was allowed to see before. Under his own eyes the tabernacle of the Church was daily spreading farther her curtains, and daily setting her stakes more strong. The prophets to whom had been vouchsafed a more distant prospect of the same end, and such were Isaiah, and Ezekiel, and Daniel, lived not to see the least trace of the beginning of the accomplishment of their predicted blessings. On the contrary, the porchway of the temple of the future was dark indeed, and filled with a ghastly throng : desolation, captivity, famine, and the demons of plague, fire, and sword, sate there. But John's eye of flesh was advanced to within the door, and saw the inner brightness. He beheld indeed the sword raised against the Church, he saw it descend upon it. But it clave it as it would water. A wave or two was raised, and then all was smooth and continuous again. The axe and brand were furiously wielded. But the temple of the Church stood. Amid the devouring rage of the conflagration around, amid the blood flowing about it, still it was seen standing in tranquil majesty, still the blaze of the in-dwelling glory was seen illumining its windows, still the voices of thanksgiving and hosannas of victory were heard proceeding from within, unassailable by the powers without. And may not every Christian share some-

what of the blessedness of this blessed apostle? May not he, even though the brand and axe of the destroyer may lay low his temple of stone and timber, contemplate in unmoveable security his heavenly temple of God's Church. This can never be removed from his sight. This is no Jewish temple which John lived to see laid in ashes. It cannot fail his eyes for a moment. Let what will surround him, be it darkness which may be felt, yet the very darkness sets this out in stronger light. He never beheld it so distinct before. He can count every column, read all the historic carving of the frieze, and see its domes and porticos thrown out into all the majestic amplitude of their glorious proportions. From the very depths of his dungeon does this vision arise to comfort the heart of the faithful and patient Christian.

For the latter years of his life, St. John probably stood alone of all the train of the hearers and beholders of the Lord, and he was surrounded by those who knew him but through his preachers. He was the last who could tell those minute anecdotes of the Lord which can be communicated but by word of mouth alone, which require the voice, the gesture, to give them effect, and will not bear the formality of writing. If he ever indulged the garrulity of age, how precious that garrulity. The period of life to which old age delights to recur had been spent in the company of the Lord of life. What a privilege must it have been to hear him. How must his Church have flocked around the old man, anxious to pick up every crumb as it were that fell beneath his table, for every crumb was of the bread of life. His

end is strongly contrasted with that of his colleagues. His two companions in his Lord's especial favour, Peter and James the elder, sealed their faith with their blood. So too did Paul and James the less. But John died in peace amid the general peace of the Church. The apostle of love died amid love. He bequeathed the Church his Gospel, and he left behind him (and he alone) a succession of writers, Ignatius, Polycarp, Irenæus, which did glorious service in the holy cause. His very long life was of eminent advantage to the Church. Its government had time to settle, and receive his sanction, and the canon of the Gospels was completed and ratified by him. At the age of an hundred he closed his long labours, and slept in the Lord.

## TIMOTHY.

A. D. 53.

THERE is at once a change in our thoughts and feelings when we descend from the apostles and disciples who saw Christ, to the next succession of those who only heard of him. We have left a class who enjoyed a privilege of which we admire the preciousness, but are lost in attempting to conceive the happiness and dignity, and come to those whom he hath blessed, as having not seen, and yet believed. We are come to persons much in the same situation with ourselves. The obedience which they pay to their predecessors, and the faith which they hold are much the same as our own. They had only the conception and not the bodily presence or memory of the Lord to stir them. Their faith was in every respect the evidence of things not seen. They had not only to take on faith with the apostles the coming to raise the dead, but the very foundation of their hope, the resurrection of Jesus: not only the mediation in heaven, but even the sacrifice upon earth. Thus we feel represented in them, and their example touches us much more nearly. We have quitted the huge foundation stones of the wall of our Sion, and are come to the first course of the wall into which we ourselves are built, and the only privilege

they have, is that they lie immediately upon the foundation, while our place is among the uppermost courses. Of some of this succession we have incidental mention in Scripture. St. Paul in his various travels was surrounded, as it were, with a Prætorian troop of them, whom he employed in different ways. St. Luke has given us a list of those who attended him from Greece to Asia<sup>1</sup>. These were Sosipater of Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica, Gaius, and Timothy, and Tychicus, and Trophimus, and Luke. Of most of these honourable mention occurs in the epistles, and of none so honourable as of Timothy, who was the most attached and most eminent of all Paul's young companions.

It was on his second round of visitation and preaching in Asia, that St. Paul came to Derbe, a city of Lycaonia. Here he found a young disciple, named Timothy, whose high character had received the testimony of the churches of Iconium and Lystra, where he had been preaching on a former visitation, and had converted his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice<sup>2</sup>. His father was a Greek, and most probably dead: otherwise he would surely have made difficulties about his son's circumcision. Thus he was left quite to the care of his mother, who was a Jewess. Hence without doubt he derived those amiable qualities which so much endeared him to all whithersoever he was sent, and peculiarly fitted him, as far as natural affections can fit, for the mi-

<sup>1</sup> Acts xx. 4. Valknaer's reading, referring Timothy to Derbe seems probable.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. i. 5.

nistry of the Gospel of peace. But from her he derived spiritual endowments also. She taught him, or at least was mainly instrumental in teaching him, the faith in Christ; and her child grew not only in mind, but in spirit too. So continually was her care bestowed, and so well did he repay it, that St. Paul immediately discovered in the youth a most useful fellow-labourer, and determined to take him with him. The son and his widowed mother parted: he gave up his mother and followed Christ, as James and John had quitted their father for him, and she presented her child to the Lord, counting the loss of all for gain, so she could but win Christ. Sad would have been the parting had there been no higher feeling than natural affection on each side. She was left solitary, and he was going upon an errand of certain toil and danger. But they had that spiritual union which neither distance of time nor place can sever. They were one in Christ. Their bodily separation, were it even for life, was but temporary, was but of a few minutes in the day of eternity. Since the Jews were very numerous and influential in those parts, and would certainly take offence at the preaching and ministration of an uncircumcised teacher, Paul admitted him to the rite of circumcision, and then took him with him on his travels.

The circuit of this second tour of Paul was very much enlarged by being extended to the Grecian continent, at the express order of the Holy Spirit. Thus Timothy assisted in the foundation of the famous Churches of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth. At the two first places he had a proof of the trials which

awaited the preachers of Christ crucified, more especially at the hands of the Jews, to whom the doctrine was much more generally a stumbling-block, than it was foolishness to the Greeks; but the persecution does not appear to have descended lower than the two principals, Paul and Silas. At Berea they found acceptable hearers and peace, until the Jews of Thessalonica came to disturb them there also. This produced a short separation of the party. It was necessary to the safety of Paul that he should quit the place. The brethren conducted him to Athens, while Timothy remained with Silas behind. How he was employed during this interval appears from Paul's two letters to the Thessalonians, the first of which he wrote from Corinth after Timothy had rejoined him. From this we find that Paul, on leaving Berea, had charged him to go to Thessalonica,<sup>1</sup> and confirm the brethren there. This was a charge both of difficulty and danger; the persecution set on foot by the Jews, at the very first preaching of the Gospel, by Paul, continued to rage there, insomuch that Paul, upon hearing of it, began to fear lest they should be overcome by the trial, and all his labour should prove vain<sup>2</sup>. Here indeed Timothy's Greek extraction would render him eminent service, since the great majority of the believers were Greeks, and it may have somewhat allayed the fierce spirit of the Jews, which they breathed towards one of their countrymen teaching such doctrines. Yet how must he have won the confidence of Paul, the keensighted, the watchful, the spiritual Paul, that, being

<sup>1</sup> Thess. iii. 2. Acts xvii. 14.<sup>2</sup> 1 Thess. iii. 5.

so young<sup>1</sup>, he should be selected for such a high office as instructing, comforting, and supporting an infant church, as yet staggering in weakness of members, and subjected to persecution. How great must have been his ability, who could be trusted with the combat against the Jews, who, thinking themselves in sole possession of God's Church, used every weapon as well of argument as of violence to keep all others out. How unblemished his conversation, which could defy the malignant spirit of calumny which controversy ever provokes, and at the same time give confidence to his own followers. How great his discretion, which, amid the perplexities besetting his situation, both from friends and foes, could keep him in the straight path, could admonish without offence, and conciliate without concession. How great his humility, which could resist the flattery, and his resolution which could defy the menaces which were directed towards him; and, how powerful the help of God's Holy Spirit, which, quickening all the inner man, could uphold this youthful teacher so securely in the slippery path of his duty. Truly he affords a most encouraging example to every youthful minister to exercise, with confidence in God's assisting Spirit, all the gifts with which he has been endowed. Let him dedicate them to his service, lay them upon his altar, and He, who makes his ministers a flaming fire, will pour down the fire of his Spirit on them, and turn them into glorious and unfailling ministers of his service.

Having faithfully fulfilled his charge, Timothy re-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 12.

turned, according to orders, to St. Paul, who, having quitted Athens, had gone to Corinth. Here the party remained so long as a year and a half, during which time the foundations of that Church were firmly laid. What share Timothy had in the labours of the Apostle of the Gentiles is evident from the second letter of the Apostle to this Church, in which his name is mentioned, together with St. Paul's, in the opening salutation, as one who had been distinguished by his services there; just as it is in the commencement of both the letters to the Thessalonians. Here, however, he was released from the heaviest part of the charge of preaching the Gospel, and which at Thessalonica was all but overwhelming. Shortly after the arrival of him and Silvanus, and perhaps in some degree influenced by the accounts of Jewish opposition which they brought with them, Paul, no longer bearing with the resistance and blasphemy of the Jews, gave them up to their own ways, quitted the Synagogue, and confined himself to the Gentiles. He had made, however, a most important conversion in Crispus, the chief ruler of the Synagogue, and this again was followed by the accession of Sosthenes, another chief ruler. Thus encouraged, he staid longer here than in any other place, Ephesus and Rome excepted. Timothy left Corinth with St. Paul, on his return to Asia, and when they had arrived at Ephesus, they made their abode there for nearly three years. Towards the expiration of this time he dispatched Timothy and Erastus together, to precede him in a journey into Macedonia. Here he would have to set in order the Churches of Philippi and Berroea, and above all, would re-visit the scene of his former toils, Thessa-

lonica. Great must have been the mutual joy. The infancy of this church was full of tears and weeping. The Jews were powerful enough to vex its members with severe persecution, to which the letters of St. Paul to them contain many and direct allusions. The presence of their founder, as they might almost call Timothy, would give them exceeding comfort; and great would be his satisfaction at seeing their fortitude and patience for the sake of the name of Christ. He shortly saw a strong contrast in the restless and overweening members of the flourishing Church of Corinth, which St. Paul had charged him to visit, and put in remembrance (which it very much wanted) of his doctrine and teaching in Christ<sup>1</sup>. On returning to Macedonia, he was joined by Paul, and henceforward they were continually together, until he was sent with episcopal powers to govern the Church of Ephesus.

In the course of these travels he visited two churches, interesting beyond all others, from the peculiarity of their situation. These were Jerusalem and Rome. The first was in great affliction, even to bodily destitution, through the incessant persecution of both the people and government. He had the satisfaction of seeing them relieved for a time by the contributions which Paul had gathered from the Greek Churches, and brought with him. His devout spirit was here fed incessantly by the sight of the monuments of God's mighty works of mercy. He walked through the streets of the city of David. He trod Mount Sion. He saw Mount Moriah crowned with the Temple, and entering into its courts, saw

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 17.

the crowds of priests, the numerous and splendid sacrifices, which carried him back to the times of David and Solomon. But now it was all an unmeaning show, an empty shadow, the substance of which he beheld in the poor persecuted Church of Christ, which abode in fear and trembling under its wall. Here was now the true Temple of God, the Temple of the Holy Ghost. He saw too all the scenes of his Saviour's sufferings, and daily conversed with those who had witnessed them, and seen him ascend from them into his glory. All around him, the very air itself, seemed full of spiritual meaning. From the spectacle of this Church he was transferred, with scarcely the sight of one, intermediate, to the presence of that of Rome, where it lay like the smallest piece of leaven concealed amid the huge mass of heathenism in the capital of the heathen world. But its want of notice from the supercilious and uninquiring glances of heathen princes and philosophers, was also its means of peace and security. It was silently, but daily adding to its numbers; and the arrival of Paul, and the notoriety attending him, spread the name of Christ around, so that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ was preached<sup>1</sup>. Yet when Timothy walked through this enormous and splendid city, and saw the massy strength of heathenism, both in its political and religious institutions, represented to his eye by innumerable buildings and temples, all vast, and splendid, and built to outlast ages, how deep and manifold must have been the reflections which sug-

<sup>1</sup> Phil. i. 17.

gested themselves to him. He knew that the day would come when his little despised Church should overflow into every one of these buildings, and displace their worship. But the day and the hour were hidden from his eyes, and the bonds of his master were before them.

Being released a short time before his master was<sup>1</sup>, he waited for him in the south of Italy, and there once again renewed with him the journeys made for founding new churches, and revisiting old. This tour ended with his being left with the charge of the Church at Ephesus, a Church which engaged more than any other the care of the first preachers of Christ. Paul had made it his head-quarters in Asia, and on one occasion spent three years continuously in it, and John was about to make it the abode of his old age. But although thus divided from his dear master and spiritual father, he was not left without communion with him. He had not been long in his charge before he received his first letter from Paul. Even before we come to the detail, the very circumstance of such a letter being written teems with interest. The elderly and experienced Paul, who had been rapt up to the third heaven, who was now approaching fast to the close of his earthly course, filled with the Holy Ghost, writes to the youthful Timothy, his own son, begotten in the Gospel, long tried in the share of many and great perils, and by commissions faithfully executed on various occasions. He gives him directions on public prayer, instructions respecting the ordination of priests and deacons, cautions

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xiii. 23.

him against heretics, with much advice on various points of his commission, concluding with a most solemn charge before God and Jesus Christ, that he should keep the commandment without spot and unblameable. Treading diligently in the steps of this advice, Timothy was taken up with the duties of his office, when he received a second and last letter from his beloved master. It was written with all the solemnity of one who was on the point of departure, and with all the prophetic spirit of a dying saint. He earnestly conjured Timothy to apply himself with all his gifts of grace to his holy work, to hold fast the form of sound words which he had heard of him, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. He again cautions him against heretics, and gives him a mournful description of the moral state of the perilous times which should come, and which should be anticipated by every possible exertion, in preaching, in reproving, in rebuking, in exhorting with all long-suffering and doctrine. To this work he exhorted him by a solemn and urgent charge before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Judge of the quick and the dead. He then gave some affecting hints of his present destitution, and approaching martyrdom. He was ready to be offered up, he said, the time of his departure was at hand. His prætorian troop before mentioned had been scattered, some sent by himself elsewhere, others having forsaken him. Luke alone was with him. He therefore urged Timothy to come to him, telling him that he had sent Tychicus off to Ephesus. He concluded with sending the greetings of the brethren of the Church of Rome, who had enjoyed the fruits of his

service, when he was there a partner in Paul's first imprisonment. The whole letter is exquisitely pathetic, and must have moved indeed the affectionate spirit of Timothy. Whether he arrived at Rome in time to find his Master alive, does not any where appear. Here ends all the knowledge which we have of Timothy.

The beautiful character of Timothy shines forth with great distinctness from the expressions in these letters. Affection and zeal, meekness and fortitude, ardour and discretion, kept in proper balance by piety unfeigned, were its prevailing qualities. How delicately does St. Paul touch the string of his filial love and duty, in telling him how he is persuaded, that the unfeigned faith which dwelt in his grandmother Lois, and mother Eunice dwelt in him also. We find, however, that this vigorous, though gentle mind, was contained in the frame of but a slender body, which was made still more slender by his hard labour in the service of the Lord. St. Paul advises him to drink no longer water, but to use a little wine on account of his weak stomach, and frequent illness. How delightfully does this little anecdote peep out with its individuality from amid the general admonitions around it. It brings before us at once the zealous and unsparing exertions of Timothy, which went beyond his strength; it shows his cautious abstemiousness, and displays the affectionate anxiety and deep regard of St. Paul. Perhaps there was no character of the apostolic period of which the biography would have been more delightful, or more profitable than that of Timothy. But the few notices which we glean from Scripture is all

that we have, at least in any authentic shape. One reason for this loss, is no doubt the purity of the early times of the Church. Recorded examples were not so much needed then to guide and to stimulate. What these supply, men had in themselves, and in all around. The life of Timothy was the life of every zealous preacher of the Gospel. It is in times of declining piety that examples are held forth. Then men must look beyond themselves for a guide, then, like the ignorant of letters, they need a picture to inform them. Then what was the continual employment of their predecessors, so that they were almost as unconscious of it as of the motion of the blood in their veins, is become a studied recreation and exercise : what was a daily and common-place spectacle is become a wonder and theme of admiration. Alas ! it is no favourable symptom of times when written lives of saints abound. They are confessed exceptions to the general rule.

But there is quite enough said of Timothy in Scripture to stir up our hearts and minds. Let every one who is charged with any office (and who is not charged with some, and where is the real stage of that office for a Christian, whatever it be, but in God's Church ?) ponder upon his character, and above all, read again and again St. Paul's letters to him. There is not therein a word of exhortation, of warning, of advice, of comfort, which he may not take to heart as applied to himself. Be he in joy or in sorrow, in health or in sickness, he may find therein something to meet his feelings, and purify and hallow the affection of the hour. But above all, the minister of the Gospel of Christ will find there his storehouse

of spiritual treasure. If he be faithful, he must undergo persecution in one shape or other, or the world would be no longer the world. He must encounter false teachers. He must need exhortation, in order to give exhortation. He must, therefore, stir up the grace which is in him by the Spirit which is in every sentence of those letters, that so he may hold fast the form of sound words, may shun perverse disputings, may keep the good things committed to him through the Holy Ghost, may flee lusts, and follow righteousness, and faith, and charity, and peace, may fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold of eternal life. More especially is this preparation requisite now, when times are coming, yea are even now come, which are precisely similar to those foretold to Timothy by the apostle in such fearful terms. We have been brought up in them, our eyes and ears are too much accustomed to their unholy sights and sounds to be alarmed of themselves. Let us draw a wholesome alarm from these letters. Let us hence discover the low standard of our own age, and gain an insight into the purity, and a fellow feeling with the innocence of Timothy, to whom St. Paul speaks as to one who had no conception of such times. These predictions were an awful warning to Timothy that their fulfilment should in nowise be owing to any remissness in his duties, but that he should, like one preparing against a siege, lay in a store and means of resistance by unwearied exertion, to-day, while it could be called to-day. To us they announce that our fortress is already beleaguered, and bid us put on all the armour of light, and fight a good fight. May

the apostle's prayer for Timothy be put by us for ourselves also, and prevail. "May the Lord Jesus Christ be with our spirit: may his grace be with us <sup>1</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 22. It will be seen that, both in this account of Timothy, and that of Demas which follows, the second Epistle to Timothy has been considered as written during St. Paul's second imprisonment at Rome. This date obviously suggests itself to every reader, and has been confirmed by the unanimous voice of antiquity. The moderns who refer it to the time of St. Paul's first imprisonment, are almost exclusively Anti-Episcopalians or Papists, and therefore may justly be suspected of a bias; the former party being concerned to deny the permanency of Timothy's charge at Ephesus, the latter not knowing what to make of the omission of Peter's name in the salutations. It is one among many instances in which these extremes meet on the same ground from directly opposite points.

## DEMAS.

A. D. 67.

IN full and melancholy contrast with the character of Timothy stands that of Demas. His name has become a by-word in the Church for fickle and faint-hearted comrades in peril and affliction. He blossomed fairly, but brought no fruit. He was one of the youthful band which Paul kept in attendance upon him, that they may grow up under his own eyes into faithful ministers of Christ. Nor was he the last among these. He did good service in the church at Colosse, insomuch that the apostle admitted his greetings among the rest in his letters from Rome, both in that written to the Church, and in that to Philemon<sup>1</sup>. In each of these his name appears in company with those of Mark and Luke. Mournful indeed is the reflection upon such fellowship; the praise of Mark and Luke has endured and will endure in the Gospel for ever. Their names stand high in the calendar of holy men in the Church, and will ever be pronounced with reverence and thankfulness as among those of its most efficient builders. The spirit of many hearts is daily lighted up at the spirit which dwells in their writings. And

<sup>1</sup> Col. iv. 4. Philem. 24.

equally durable with their praise will be the condemnation of Demas ; it has been and will be daily pronounced by believers throughout all ages of that Church whose interests he in the moment of her peril betrayed. Alas the sad fall, the solemn warning ! His name which was written in the fellowship of saints is now on the black catalogue of sinners, it is the sorrow of good men, and the mockery of bad.

In company with Mark, Luke, Aristarchus, Ephras, he attended upon St. Paul during his first imprisonment at Rome : if imprisonment that could be called, in which Paul lived in his own hired house, and received all that came in to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and no man forbidding him <sup>1</sup>. His very bonds, such as they were, helped much rather than hindered the cause of the Gospel, both by confirming by his example the endurance of the brethren within the Church, and by making him notorious to those without, even in the very palace and household of Cæsar <sup>2</sup>. Christ was thus publicly proclaimed, and although some published his name not with any view to the truth, but, on the contrary, to bring his preacher Paul into trouble, ascribing false and mischievous doctrines to him, and such especially would be the unbelieving Jews <sup>3</sup>, yet others, taking courage by his example, and resolved to clear his character, knowing that he was set for the defence of the Gospel, preached Christ through love and sincerity. One main point of resistance which had been so formidable elsewhere,

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxviii. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Philipp. i. 13, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Acts xxviii. 24.

was here much abated. In the plundered and impoverished provinces of Greece and the East, the Jews, as under the same circumstances at this day, engrossed the wealth of the country, and therefore, under a government which respected their religion as being a national one, their power of persecuting the Christians, whom they represented as apostates, was almost equal to their will. But here, in the enormous and wealthy capital, filled with all the rank of the empire, they were lost, were sunk in the very dregs of its populace, objects of derision and contempt. Demas therefore had nothing to encounter here like that which Timothy had at Thessalonica. Such too of the heathen as were likely to raise opposition had not as yet deigned even to hear of the rising sect. All therefore went on prosperously; the faith was working silently, but surely, and the Church of Rome soon became both more wealthy and more numerous than any other.

In this state of things Demas was now serving under Paul, and, without doubt, with much zeal and fidelity. The word went forth from him not only unhindered, but was even greedily received. Perhaps his worldly-minded spirit was stimulated by vanity, and was gratified in bringing others over to his own opinions: perhaps it was moved quite as much by the delight of receiving the homage, the reverence, and the applause of the converts, as by love towards Christ, flowing back from him towards men. Not that he was conscious of this, nor that such motives were unmingled with much better. Alas, we seldom discern our infirmities and their dominion over us, until they shall have

broken forth into some outward act which accuses us before man as well as God. He thought that he was doing God's work from a truly godly spirit. He loved God, but did not know that he loved the world better. He had not been called to make his final choice between two masters. Michael and Satan had not yet contended for him; a fair smooth skin concealed the deep-seated ulcer. Thus he went on his way rejoicing. He found the service of God most pleasant; it was its own reward; and he approved himself to his Master Paul by much valuable assistance. He could also cast back his eye to good work done by him in the church of Colosse, and others. Thus all was gratifying to Demas, whether he looked to the present or to the past. He had, as he thought, approved himself unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed. Scarcely can there be conceived a situation more delightful than his present. He was filled with all the peace and bliss which the Gospel so bounteously bestows in return for its service, even upon slight and short labour. And this world had put on none either of those allurements or menaces, which fix our eyes upon it in irresistible enchantment. The old serpent had not glared upon him with his brazen eyes, and fascinated him so as to fall, like the poor quivering bird, into his jaws. No irreconcilable difference had as yet been discovered between the essential prospects of heaven and earth. The gulf had not yet appeared which yawns between them. Oh no! all was smooth and continuous, the grassy plain here was one with the grassy plain there, and the cross of Christ and the staff of worldly comfort seemed not

set up upon opposite brinks. They seemed to stand on one and the same soil. Boldly therefore he went on without fear of stumbling. There is something very fearful in the sight of Demas thus walking, when we consider how we ourselves may be walking with him. Have we had our hour of trial which has decided our choice for this world or the next? How few can answer here. How many may be as Demas. Until we have tasted of the fruit of the tree of the cross, and, however bitter as gall to the taste, acknowledged it as sweet as honey to the stomach, and confessed that it is indeed the fruit of the tree of life, up to that moment we are as untried as Demas. We may be active in our ministry as Demas was, and yet be tempted to quit it for the ease of the present world; we may run swift, and yet uncertainly so as to stumble; we may preach unto others, and be ourselves castaways. The second year of abode at Rome was now coming to a close: the Gospel had had free course; and so little did even St. Paul apprehend any obstruction, that in his letters he speaks confidently of his approaching liberation, and bids Philemon prepare him a lodging, and, in a manner evidently betokening their cheerful condition, sends the salutations of Demas and his companions. Thus was finished with satisfaction to himself, and good report in the Church, the first sojourn of Demas at Rome.

After an interval of about four years he attended Paul thither again. Delightful must have been the anticipations of this visit: the private welcome of beloved friends, the public congratulations of a celebrated church, awaited him. His affections of

the mind and of the spirit were stirred at the thought ; he came, and Rome was no longer to Demas that Rome which it had been before ; the wild boar had broken into the vineyard of its church, the former cheerfulness was turned into mourning ; since he had been there, the Christian name had challenged general notice. And this was a signal for an attack from all quarters. The magistrates regarded with jealousy a secret society, as it seemed to them to be. The people hated it for a thousand reasons. Some loathed it as a viler sect of vile Judaism. Some felt rebuked by the unblemished lives of its maintainers. Some were shocked at its rejection of all the rites which their superstitious idolatry thought essential to religion. Some abhorred its gloominess, which revolted from their shows and spectacles. It had scarcely reached the notice of the philosopher, who as yet was content to despise it at a distance ; but it was known to be making sensible progress, and many a head of a family discovered, to his amazement and horror, that it had obtained footing in his own house. It was at once despised and dreaded. Nero, therefore, could not have chosen a more fit subject for the odious charge of having lighted that dreadful conflagration, which consumed the best part of Rome. The Christians were no sooner named than the whole city hailed the charge with acclaim, and a furious persecution commenced, and proceeded with detestable cruelty. In such a state did Demas find the church to which he had looked for so much gratification. Dear friends were missing, some having expired in tortures, some having fled, some perhaps having apostatized. A wretched, trem-

bling remnant stealthily met in the name of their crucified Master, expecting every time to be offered after his example. The word of God was now hindered indeed. It could be preached but in caves underneath the earth, in cellars, and in catacombs. And thus were its hearers confounded in the same charge with those who shunned the light of day for very different purposes. Where were now the greetings and marks of approbation which had been so gratifying to Demas? The preacher and the hearer dared scarcely recognize each other in public. Paul was found out with great difficulty by Onesiphorus. God's approval spoken to the conscience was now the only reward; priority of merit procured also priority of suffering. The name of Christian was a death-warrant; the life was in jeopardy every hour; every hour lived through, was one redeemed from expected death; men died daily. Thus had the separation taken place between this world and the world to come; two masters were now offered to the choice whose service was incompatible, and men must either hate the one and love the other, or hold to the one and despise the other.

After many vain trials of reconciling these enemies, and having looked about in amazement and perplexity for some delay of the decisive moment, Demas was compelled to make his election, and in an evil hour he made it. Yet without doubt he endeavoured to satisfy his own conscience. The greater the danger and discomfort of resisting the world, the more plentiful and pressing are the arguments with which the evil one supplies us. He might say to Demas, The word is effectually hindered here, why should

you needlessly stay and run the hourly hazard of your life in preaching it? is it not almost a tempting of God? What services can you render to Paul, who is now too strictly guarded to admit of them, and has already dispersed most of his attendants to various places? Why should you be kept here rather than they? You are not a minister of the Church of Rome. It has its own ministry, and you are but its guest; but were you at Thessalonica, you could do good service. You could preach the word where it could be heard, and where you would have all your influence and your powers unhindered. So might he be tempted to reason, forgetting that God's will had placed him at Rome; his own was taking him to Thessalonica. God had set him down there for trial, and he was shrinking and skulking from it. Death itself was then a species, and the most powerful and affecting, of preaching. God has chosen this ministry for me, would say the faithful and resigned Christian, and his will and not mine be done. But not so said Demas; he chose to live. He loved the sun of this world better than the sun of righteousness of the next. O, never let us, with Demas, allow an imaginary future good to weigh a hair in the balance against a present duty. If we once grant ourselves this licence, there will be no end of subterfuges from every disagreeable charge; and with the word of God on our lips, we shall be the grossest of worldlings. We disobey the word of God, and are guilty not only of this wickedness, but of the folly too of looking to a future which depends not on us, but on him whom we are disobeying. Fools

that we are, that very night may our souls be required of us.

Demas, however, made up his mind to this life. Body with him prevailed over soul. He had not sufficient faith to rely on that which he did not see. He felt, and saw, and heard the sweets of the body, and loved them, as having no vivid conception of aught more lovely. He believed, indeed, and firmly in the life to come. But he looked to it only through the whole extent that he could gain of this life. It was an exchange which he must some time or other endure, but at no time would choose. It never had been his sole and unhindered prospect. When, therefore, the lion's mouth came opening upon him, he did not say to himself in the faith of his master, Paul, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and save me unto everlasting life<sup>1</sup>," he did not fix his eyes in courageous and triumphant hope upon a crown of glory, he did not endeavour to keep the faith, to finish his course. No. He looked back in the race. He stopt short, and gave up the prize. Whether he argued the point with Paul does not appear. If he did we may see part of the apostle's probable reply in the twelfth chapter of the Hebrews. We may conceive him saying, "Thou hast not yet resisted unto blood . . . whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth . . . if thou endure chastening, God dealeth with thee as with a son . . . make straight then the paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way . . . be

<sup>1</sup> Tim. iv. 18.

not as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright, and afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, was rejected ; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears . . . see that thou refuse not him that speaketh ; for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shalt not thou escape, if thou turn away from him that speaketh from heaven . . . remember, that thy God is a consuming fire." In a strain similar to this he may have laid before him the sin of deserting his post, of neglecting the voice of God, which was calling upon his servants to stand manfully where he had fixed them. But all would be lost upon one whom this world held fast by even a single tie, and he perhaps had many. The apostle may have dismissed him in the end with bidding him do as seemed him best before God and our Lord Jesus Christ ; and although unwilling that Demas should give up himself, may not have been unwilling to be abandoned by so heartless a follower, and this the faithless servant may have greedily caught at as leave to go. He went, and left his master's face, never to see it again in this life. Will he see it again in the next life ? How awful is the question.

So Demas left Rome. He left the axe, and the sword, and the stake behind him. But what was before him, when this irrevocable step had been taken ? When he found himself alone, and the removal of his terror gave him better opportunity for reflection, what dreadful misgivings, what ill-stifled self-reproach must have assailed him. How must his thoughts upon his abandoned dying comrades

have accused him. How humiliating must have been his reflections, how deep his dejection. And where should he seek comfort? its only door was closed against him. He had abandoned the cause of his crucified Master. He reached Thessalonica. But what account could he give of himself to the Church there? With what heart could he preach the word, who had deliberately disobeyed it? Who would listen to him, who came before them in so equivocal a character? How should he now do that compensating good in Thessalonica with the promise of which he had satisfied his reluctant conscience? The very opportunity was taken away from him. For who would trust with any charge this timid fugitive? The real cause of his appearance there would not long be a secret, and then who would attend to the faithless Demas? How should he preach the life to come, who had preferred to it the present? How should he warn against the judgment to come, who himself had slighted it? How should he confirm and comfort, who was so notorious an example of failing faith? How should he remove stumbling-blocks, who had himself fallen, and was at the moment prostrate? Alas! all his dreams of good service were fled. He found himself utterly stripped, as if in the open face of the Church, of his priestly vesture of ministry. He was a scorn, a mockery, and a castaway.

But worse still soon came. The last letter of the dying martyr to Timothy would before long be publicly read in the Church of Thessalonica, with which Timothy had formed so close and fond an intimacy. How then, with what ears, with what face, must Demas have

heard these words, " Demas hath forsaken me, loving the present life, and is gone to Thessalonica <sup>1</sup>." How must he have shrunk, not only from the public gaze, but also from the eyes of his own heart. Where should he hide himself now? In vain would he call on the darkness to cover him, or the mountains to hide him. His own breast was full of true witnesses accusing him night and day before God. His own name came back to his ears re-echoed from the furthest corners of the Church of Christ, from places far asunder, from ages far remote, as a by-word, and term of reproach. His slumbering conscience rose as a giant refreshed from sleep, and smote him with unwearied strength. He had broken the bonds of human friendship, he had violated the oath of allegiance to his crucified Saviour. The last words, the last looks of his martyred master rose up fresh and lively in his memory, and haunted him in all his thoughts. Such would be his enjoyment of that world for which he had sacrificed so much. There is no peace in this world to him who has lost the peace of the world to come.

Whether God took pity on him and turned remorse into repentance is now known to him alone. Let us hope that on the last day he may yet be found in company with his former master, never again to be separated by a world of flattery and fear. He has left us an awful lesson. In him we may see ourselves on every deviation from the straight-forward path of duty. Whenever we wrestle against a reluctant conscience, let us remember Demas. When-

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 10.

ever we barter the present which God hath made for us, for a future of our own making, let us remember Demas. Whenever the fear of man overcomes the fear of God, let us remember Demas. Whenever the kingdom of Christ seems very reconcileable with the powers of this world, let us remember Demas. Whenever we flinch from the afflictions of the cross, and forsake the prisoner of Christ for the love of the present world, let us remember Demas. Alas! he has more followers than Paul. And we have almost all of us our Thessalonica to flee to, when our Rome, where our true service lies, presents difficulty and peril instead of its wonted ease and security. We will run any where from sorrow, even though God be in it, making his secret place in its darkness. But we must pass through things temporal, so that we lose not the things eternal, and never forget that wherever God's will shall have placed us, however cheerless and perilous the spot may be, there alone rests that ladder by which we can mount to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the Church of the living God, and become members of the assembly of the first-born enrolled in heaven.

## ONESIMUS.

A. D. 64.

THE Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon fills us with instruction and delight. Its style is easy, abounding in graceful terms of expression, and discloses most delicate feeling. It unveils the most lovely points of Paul's admirable character; but, above all, it suggests to us the first instance of the wonderful power of the Gospel of Christ over the human heart, in abolishing the horrible state of human slavery. Never was letter written on a more touching subject. It concerns both the earthly and the heavenly state of two persons, the one a master, the other a slave. It leads us to thoughts and affections which are deep and stirring. Love and charity, and thankfulness and reverence, and repentance and forgiveness, fully contrasted with their opposites, which they had entirely supplanted in these two bosoms, come before us embodied in a shape of exceeding distinctness from the peculiar situation of the persons. Their history, though short, is most instructive. Onesimus was the slave of Philemon, a citizen of Colosse<sup>2</sup>. His services little corresponded with his name, for they were unprofitable indeed. He finished his course of misconduct by robbing his master<sup>1</sup>, and running away. Rome, the common

<sup>1</sup> Col. iv. 9.

sink of the civilized world, the refuge and hiding-place of all iniquity, the capital of the abandoned and ignorant, much more than of the virtuous and wise, was the place to which he fled. A person of his condition, and under his circumstances, could not live there but in a state of extreme misery and vice. How should he gain access to anything better? without friends, without means, without character, lowest of the low in rank, he must have lived from day to day in this enormous Babylon, upon the precarious support of accidents. The portico of some heathen temple probably afforded a hard night's lodging to this future minister of the Temple of the Church of Christ, and the day was passed, now in idleness, or perhaps profligacy, and now in obtaining, by not very scrupulous means, a scanty livelihood. We can hardly presume any thing better than this, if we will but consider what must have been the misery and the profligacy of the rabble of the heathen capital of the whole heathen world. Bad as our capitals are, yet they are the sink of the refuse but of a single kingdom, and that Christian. If our heart sicken at the thoughts of what must be done and suffered daily and hourly by hundreds in these, what must we think of the corresponding condition of ancient Rome? God forbid that our imagination should ever be enabled to make any approach to its true picture.

Such was the pitiable condition of this poor slave. Often, perhaps, did he long to return to his master. Glad would he have been to eat of the husks with

<sup>1</sup> Philem. 18.

his swine. He called to mind the care which he had experienced in sickness, the kindness, the indulgence, of his treatment, and amid his utter destitution, felt how inexpressible a treasure to him would be even one person who was in the least concerned in his welfare. He had exchanged a yoke which was easy for one which was intolerable, the chance of hard labour and the whip for the certainty of misery and destitution. His mind cannot but have revolted from the company into which he was compelled, and the means of livelihood to which he was forced ; and how dreadful must have been the dejection, the self-disesteem, and the consequent recklessness and despair. The most wretched and guilty of Christians has a resource of hope and comfort, and even joy. In the moment that he turns to God, he finds a friend. But this was denied to the heathen. His best friend was eternal separation from himself, and all around, and above, and below ; his only comforter was everlasting death.

But how unsearchable is the wisdom and goodness of God, and his ways past finding out. All that which seemed destined to accomplish the eternal ruin of Onesimus, was turned into the means of his regeneration to everlasting life. He was brought within hearing of the sound of the Gospel. The word of God came to this chosen servant like the law to Israel, amid the horrors of moral darkness and storm. The mercy of God, under the shape of some accident which has not been related, led him to hear St. Paul, who was now preaching during his first abode at Rome. Thirsty indeed, and faint, the wretched runaway came to the fountain, and greedily drank in the

living waters of eternal life. In the Gospel the poor destitute found at once, to his joyful surprise, a house, a master, friends and comfort. The garments of righteousness which moth doth not eat were thrown around him : the meat and drink, which perish not, were supplied to him. The heart-corroding misery of moral degradation was exchanged for that surpassing peace of joy which the Gospel so abundantly bestows on its believers. To feel himself once again erect, after having been a cripple bent double ; to look onward to everlasting life, when all that he hoped or feared had for so long a time terminated in this present ; to have dropped the burden of the conscience, and to walk free and unencumbered before God : these were his first sensations of the newness of life to which he had been so mercifully called. To a slave, as he was, the glad tidings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ must have come with overpowering effect. The analogy of his bodily slavery made him feel more quickly the horrors of moral bondage, and the blessedness of spiritual freedom. Redeemer, and redemption, and ransom, were words of power indeed to his heart. Captivity, and prison-house, and yoke, and burden, were not vague metaphors to him. He felt their meaning to his inmost soul. The daily and nightly lashings of remorse, the tyrannous exactions, the intolerable taskwork of sin, were felt by him with a liveliness of feeling and imagination which a free man could scarcely reach. To the poor slave the very semblance of freedom is cheerful. He will laugh, and dance, and sing before it. His real thralldom is for the moment forgotten. What then must have

been to Onesimus the announcement of that spiritual freedom, which, equalising master and slave, made all mankind one, through one Mediator with the Father? What an answer in the breast of this poor slave must those words of St. Paul have found, which, probably with Onesimus in his mind, he wrote in his letter to the Colossians, and sent by him, and which probably also he had addressed to him and men like him in his former preaching. "In the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him, there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all<sup>1</sup>." With what a strong zest must he have tasted of the spiritual freedom in Christ. He who so well knew what it was to have his body with all its motions in subjection to the will of another, who had felt also the moral slavery of sin, how must he have exulted in throwing off the yoke of the dominion of the world, the flesh, and the devil. From that moment it was a matter of indifference to him whether his body were enslaved or not. He had cast off its sovereignty. His spirit was free in Christ.

With such ardour did Onesimus embrace the Gospel, that he won the especial notice of St. Paul, who soon discovered that his nature answered to his name, and found his ministry *profitable*, as a slave of Jesus Christ. The apostle regarded him with that earnest affection which the love of Christ inspires towards the brethren. What an earnest was here to the poor friendless runaway of the love of his new Master

<sup>1</sup> Col. iii. 11.

Christ. What a change it was to be transferred from destitute solitude or degrading companionship to the warm kindness, the overflowing charity, the pure and spotless society of the saints. What a lively representation did this acceptance in the visible church of Christ exhibit of his acceptance in the invisible? It assured to him his reconciliation in heaven, and typified the joy of the angels over his repentance. His chilled heart must have been warmed and melted with overflowing thankfulness towards his Redeemer, when he found even the pledges and shadows, as it were, of his blessings, to be so delightful and so substantial. In the supper of the Lord this poor outcast of society sat as an equal among the good and blameless. And so did he put to account the grace and gifts bestowed upon him, that he soon gained among them a place of high esteem and consideration, and enjoyed the especial confidence and love of Paul. To him he proved himself a dutiful and thankful spiritual son, whom he had begotten in his bonds, and made a slave to the freedom of the Gospel.

But this entire change of heart, and devotion to the truth in Christ was the very reason why he was desirous of leaving Rome. His enlightened conscience could not now endure the thoughts of the wrong which he had done to his master: these were continually next his heart. There was one person still with whom he felt not at peace, and to him, who had tasted so deeply of the Gospel of peace, the feeling was intolerable. To his unconverted mind the notion of reparation had never occurred. He had thought perhaps, whenever he did think upon

the matter, that the property of which he had robbed his Master was but a trifle, set against the long, unjust, compulsory use which had been made of his body and limbs. He had put to sleep his conscience with abstract notions (the favourite resource of villainy) about the natural unlawfulness of slavery. But he now found that, however unlawful it may be on the principles of natural freedom, yet this was not the question. God had assigned him the lot of a slave, and this lot he could not forego without violating some principle of the Gospel. Here was his post of service, and hither therefore he must return. His own father in the Gospel had put an end to all doubt, if he could have entertained any. He had said to the members of the church of Corinth, "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called, being a slave? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather, for he that is called in the Lord, being a slave, is the Lord's freed man: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's slave. Ye are bought with a price: be not ye the slaves of men<sup>1</sup>." He determined therefore to make restitution both of his service and of his property to his master among the first-fruits of his works of sanctification. And how different henceforward would be that service; it would be no longer the eye-service of a man-pleaser, but would be performed in singleness of heart, and with the fear of God<sup>1</sup>. Its faithfulness would be grounded

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Col. iii. 22. perhaps Onesimus (by whom he sent the letter) was in his thoughts here.

on the base of his Christian liberty. Nothing would come forth grudgingly, but all flow forth easily like the water from a continually replenished fountain, gushing copiously yet quietly in every direction. To him his slavery to man was a mere name. His real slavery was to Jesus Christ, his everlasting master, who had bought him from the hands of the spiritual enslaver.

Gladly would Paul have kept near him so valuable a labourer, but he himself would be the first to advise the step which Onesimus was taking. On parting with him he gave him a letter to his old master Philemon, who had been a convert of his own at Colosse. The intention of it was to reconcile him to his penitent returning slave : and never was written a letter so well adapted to work its effect ; the winning sweetness of its persuasion goes directly to the heart. Its polished gracefulness would seem to indicate that Philemon had no mean rank in society. He prepares the way by acknowledgments of his extensive charity among the saints, and expressions of the joy and comfort which the report of it brought him. He then introduces the subject of Onesimus, presuming thus that his treatment of him would be in accordance with all that he had heard. He gently reminds him how he himself owed his birth into the new life of the Gospel to him, and says that he was therefore bound to receive this his other son, not as a slave, but above a slave, as a brother beloved. He tells him that he would willingly have retained him with him, to minister to him in his stead, but that he was unwilling to do anything without his consent. He begs that he may himself have experience of that

benevolence of which he has heard towards the brethren, and that he would receive Onesimus even as himself, for that he was specially beloved by him. There is an elegant playfulness in the letter to which perhaps no language but the Greek could have given expression. The name Onesimus means "useful," or "profitable." To this meaning he alludes in those expressions, "him which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to me and to thee." And again, "Yea, brother, let me reap the use of thee in the Lord."

The effect of this letter Scripture leaves us to conclude. Surely such a letter from such a man to such a man could not be fruitless. Tradition tells us that it was not, since it mentions Onesimus as Bishop of Berœa<sup>1</sup>, a circumstance which necessarily implies his freedom. We, who cannot enter but superficially into the minute and various feelings which exist between master and slave, can have but a faint notion of what passed in the mind of Onesimus as he pursued his long journey on his return to his Master. He was returning as a brother for everlasting life to him whom he had quitted a vile and worthless slave. But how shall our heart enter into the affections with which they met. They were probably both of them heathens when they parted, and were separated by all the partitions which debased human nature can raise both in body and in mind: by wealth, by education, by absolute power, by pride, by high spirit and haughty imperious bearing on one side; by poverty, by ignorance, by utter

<sup>1</sup> Apost. Constit. vii. 46.

subjection, by fear, by suspicion, by hatred, by crouching servility on the other. Equal only in one thing had they been, and that was ignorance of the true and only God, and Jesus Christ whom he had sent. They had parted in the bitterness of gall. The master had exercised the severity, and perhaps tyrannical caprice, of power. The slave had taken revenge with the cunning malice of weakness. They were also of different blood: Philemon, a Greek, proud of the glory of heroic and wise forefathers, who had subdued the country wherein he was settled: Onesimus, either a native Phrygian, the most despised of mankind<sup>1</sup>, or a Scythian, under which name was included all that was savage and ignorant. How delightful is the contemplation of such parties thus meeting, and being at once mutually acknowledged as dear and beloved brethren in Jesus Christ, as one in him who is one with the Father. How lively is this display before our eyes of the exceeding riches of the love and mercy of the Gospel. They now met on that holy ground, where there is no difference between Greek and Jew, barbarian and Scythian, bond and free. They now met as brothers of one father, as partners in one redemption, as servants of one Master, with pure and spiritual affections, with mutual love, with mutual confidence, with mutual respect and reverence, and bound to work together, in the unity of spirit, in the labour of love which their Lord had appointed them. How earnestly did they join in offering up the sacrifice of love, and joy, and praise, and thanksgiving. Both had been de-

<sup>1</sup> Col. iv. 9. Eurip. Orest. &c.

livered from the slavery of the spirit, compared with which the slavery of the flesh is joyous freedom. Both had been subjected to the anxiety, the perplexity, the fears of the natural man, both had been bound hand and foot in the chains of sin, and bowed and kept prostrate in the dust by the abominable superstitions of debasing heathenism. And now they met free, confident, erect, sons of God, children of light, heirs of salvation, free in the liberty of the Gospel. When they parted this world was all they knew, and all they thought of. They were the fleeting beings of an hour, to be laid in due time in an irreversible everlasting equality in the dust whence they had sprung; and here was the considerate master's occasional humiliation, and here was the slave's consolation, and indulgence of the feelings of revenge. But now they met with their hopes all laid up in the world to come: they met as immortal spirits, who saw through the veil of this life into the glories of the next. To them death had been swallowed up in victory, and the equality of the grave had been anticipated by the equality of the possession of everlasting life. O what an hour was this! how seldom has earth seen such another. How precious its tears, its embraces, its mutual forgiveness, its earnest interrogatories. How did they bless their common father, Paul, through whom they now met in holiness who had separated in sin. How joyously did they compare their past with their present; how minutely did they recall to each other's mind, in order to heighten the enjoyment, the contrasted and numerous incidents of wretchedness, in body and

spirit, to which they had been subject, and return from them to the blessedness of the present hour.

Alas! we are all runaway slaves, and have erred and strayed upon our own ways; and Christ is the Philemon to whom St. Paul and Scripture remand us. We cannot too often recur to this short history. Would we deeply feel the tyranny of sin, would we arrive at an adequate view of our spiritual freedom under the Gospel, we should canvass such passages again and again. Facts such as these, appearing amid the doctrine of Scripture, contain within them a concentrated essence, as it were, of holy thought and meditation, which, as we apply our attention to them, expand, as we meditate, on every side, like a precious perfume let loose: our affections are delighted, as our senses are by delicious fragrance; all is sweetness: as men we feel nobly, warmly, and generously; as Christians we are filled with love and joy, with thankfulness, with meekness, with charity.

## FELIX.

A.D. 62.

WE have been born and bred amid the full light of the Gospel ; the most ignorant, the most careless of us, even the very apostate, cannot be entirely without the sense of its operation, and become altogether such as if he had never known it : as well may he endeavour, by voluntary blindness, to divest himself utterly of the effects which long years of enjoyment of the light of the sun have wrought on his imagination. It is for this reason that we cannot but regard with great interest the characters of those men who are brought forward in Scripture as hearing the Gospel for the first time : theirs is a situation which we can scarcely conceive with accuracy. We may commence a painful abstraction, and divest ourselves in imagination, one by one, of our many and manifold spiritual advantages ; yet, supposing that we can in the first instance be quite aware of them all, and that we can in the end strip ourselves of them as naked as we came into the world, yet this we can do only in conception ; we cannot do it in feeling and in practice, or all at once. But supposing even this done, what shall we substitute in their place ? what notions shall we adopt, so as to put ourselves exactly in the situation of those persons ? How are we to

let ourselves into the infinitely numerous modes of thought which resulted from habits unknown to us, from customs unpractised by us, from events of which we are ignorant; in short, from a state of things which it is impossible to comprehend, and represent to our minds? We cannot, in fact, arrive at that particular frame of mind in which the first hearers of the Gospel either accepted or refused the offer of everlasting life. Yet it is most instructive to go into such an examination as far as we can; and we can always go far enough to be enabled to return with exceeding thankfulness to our own happy position; and seeing more distinctly, from the contrast, our own unmerited blissfulness, to conclude with an intense feeling of grateful self-abasement. The best suited to this purpose is the consideration of the characters of that class which heard and rejected the word of life. We are in less danger of vanity and self-delusion here: by diligently tracing them, we cannot but come to some sense of our own defects. As the understanding is working out each part, the conscience is at hand to apply it to ourselves; and the faults which prevented them from listening to the Gospel may turn out to be those which prevent us from properly obeying it. Their pride, their lust, their indifference, their recklessness, their selfish indulgence, which shut them out from the light, may, in different degrees, be obscuring it to us also. It should therefore be with a salutary fear and trembling self-application, that we examine the characters of those unclean birds of darkness, which, started into the blaze of evangelical noon day, showed by their screams their painful sense of the blessed light.

Such especially is that of Felix ; and it is still more instructive from our being enabled to place it alongside with another in the same circumstances of life, those same circumstances working to an opposite effect in each. Both Felix and Onesimus had experienced the degrading condition of slavery ; one in the palace of the Cæsars ; the other in the private house of Philemon : but one rejected from his throne what the other accepted as a runaway. In one, the Gospel appealed to a heart hardened by the world's favour ; in the other, to a heart softened by the world's rough usage ; and the Gospel and the world declared their usual enmity in the choice which these men made. Felix was brother of the infamous Pallas, and, like him, displayed all the profligacy, the rapacity, the insolence, the tyranny of the slave in power. He was one of that vile and accursed tribe to whose trampling heel God, in his most righteous retribution, subjected the proudest necks of Rome, just as he had formerly punished Egypt by the plague of frogs and vermin. Through his brother's all prevailing interest, this minion obtained the government of Judea, and commenced it with heaping the same insults upon the foreign kings and nobles, as his brother did on the senators and patricians of Rome. Three wives of royal extraction were successively married to this slave ; among them was Drusilla, the daughter, the sister, and the wife of a king, whom he seduced from the arms of Aziz, king of Emesa, and married. Such was the presumption of a slave ; such the degradation of nobility. He exercised his new and royal authority, says the great

historian of Rome<sup>1</sup>, with the true disposition of a slave, through a course of every kind of lust and cruelty. Exaction and rapine, with their usual accompaniments of lawlessness and tumult, which the tampering of authorities with the bad, and their consequent feebleness from the consciousness of their share in iniquity, ever produces, marked his wretched and tyrannical government. The country was overrun with bands of robbers, encouraged by Felix himself. The Samaritans which were under his government engaged in open war with the Galileans which were under Cumanus, and either party brought the spoil to their governors. Propped up by his brother's power, he escaped the inquiry which was instituted into this matter, while Cumanus was condemned<sup>2</sup>. On another occasion his monstrous profligacy combined into one act four of the most atrocious crimes. Wishing to rid himself of the admonitions of Jonathan, the high-priest, which he found the more intolerable because he owed his government partly to his influence, he seduced by bribes the most intimate friend of his victim to procure his death, by means of the organized band of assassins which he himself encouraged. Thus he violated in the most flagitious manner the sacred bond of friendship: he procured the assassination of one whom, as governor, he was bound to protect: he  
v murdered a man of sacred, inviolable character, and at a sacred festival; a deed which even his own degraded religion might have taught him to abhor:

<sup>1</sup> Tacit. Hist. v. 9.<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Annal. xii. 54.

and he betrayed the authority of government to rebels. During the whole of his administration these bandits were allowed to steep the land in the best blood of the nation. He was, indeed, a scourge of God laid on the back of a wicked nation, and is mentioned by Tacitus among the provokers and harbingers of that sum of misery which, growing out of such misconduct from bad to worse, finally overwhelmed the Jewish state. On his being at length withdrawn from his government, a deputation of Jews was dispatched to Rome to impeach him; he escaped, however, by the powerful influence of his brother.

It was before this extortioner, this adulterer, this murderer, that Paul was brought by the Jews. It was to this man that his accuser made a florid preface of most disgusting flattery, thanking him for the exceeding peace and good success of the nation under his administration. He did not meet with the same deference from Paul: no compliment did he obtain from him, notwithstanding the reverence which his Christian principles bade him pay to authorities, and although this was an occasion on which some compliment may properly be bestowed upon a not iniquitous governor, yet nothing of this kind comes from the lips of Paul. He says indeed that, knowing that he had been governor over the nation for some years, he made his defence with greater confidence; but why? was it because he thus knew his strict justice, as Felix, no doubt, expected him to add? not at all. It was simply because his judge was thus a witness in his favour; he had thus the means of knowing that Paul, so far from being the

chief stirrer of tumults in the province, had not even been at Jerusalem until within the last twelve days, whither he had gone up from this very Cæsarea, where they now were. On St. Paul mentioning the particular doctrine of the resurrection as that of his sect, the curiosity of Felix was excited. From his present wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess, he had gained a greater knowledge of the religion of the Jews than most heathen governors would take the trouble to acquire : hence he paid more attention to what was going on around him with regard to the differences of Jew and Christian than others. He did not confound them with the haughty indifference of Gallio, as merely contending sects of the same contemptible religion. The facts which had happened at Cæsarea, the place of his own residence, such as the conversion of Cornelius, and the abode of many disciples there, would not escape his notice. He was aware, therefore, of the gross misrepresentation of the Jews, and was willing to inform himself further from such high authority as St. Paul confessedly was. As there was now no leisure for this, he deferred the cause under the pretext of waiting the arrival of Lysis, and gave Paul into custody, but with so much liberty, that his friends might come and visit him.

Perhaps to few heathens were presented such opportunities of knowing the word of life, and perhaps few were equally excluded from profiting by them through incurable, inherent viciousness of heart. Drusilla's curiosity too was raised, and she had the opportunity, which she would not deign to seek, of hearing the great apostle of Christ, whose name was

familiar in the mouths of her countrymen throughout all Asia, and she was as little capable as her husband of reaping the fruits of it. It is mournful to think that a jewel of such inestimable value should have lain at the feet, as it were, of any one, and that he should not so much as have stooped to pick it up. It lay amid the worthless dust on which his eyes were for ever bent, but its lustre was hidden from them.

After a few days Paul was summoned to appear again before Felix, who was now accompanied by Drusilla. Never were the world and the Gospel so faithfully represented, or so pointedly contrasted. On one side the wicked and adulterous couple, enthroned in the pomp and trappings of earthly power, revelling in its abuse, and wedded to it in all their thoughts and affections: on the other the servant and bondsman of Jesus Christ, the holy heir of salvation, and the life to come, gladly suffering all things for his sake, prepared even to lay down his life for his word of truth. And where are they all now? Where are Felix and Drusilla, and where is Paul? how awful, and yet how joyful is the thought! how vile, how fleeting does this world appear, when we look upon this picture and upon that. Where are its thrones and diadems, which the haggard witch puts on to disguise her deformity? how is their lustre gone before the brightness of the crown of glory, which binds the angelic brow of the son of everlasting life! melancholy is it to think that Felix and Drusilla sought to hear the Gospel, actually commanded it to be preached to them. Yet they believed not. Its sounds went forth to the deaf, its light to the blind, its hopes, its joys, its holy and

stirring affections, were preached to the senseless and seared in heart. For they sought it in pride, in vain and insolent curiosity. The love of God and his truth was not in their bosoms, there was no place for the key of the Gospel to enter and unlock them—"knock, and it shall be opened to you," said our Saviour, but these knocked merely from an impertinent curiosity to know what sight would present itself, as soon as the door was open, and therefore the door was not opened. "Ask, and ye shall receive," he has said; but they asked not for the truth, and therefore they received not. Itching ears are full of disease, which clogs their channel against the voice of truth. This was the first time, but it has not been the last, that the great of this world have commanded the Gospel to be preached to them; alas! the event has ever proved that it can be preached effectually to the poor only, that is, to the poor in spirit, to the humble and meek, to the self-denying, the self-abasing, to the conscious of their own ignorance, to those, who from inward uprightness, pursue those virtues which poverty compels in others. Let the proud first command their own hearts. What had the hearts of this iniquitous and adulterous pair to do with the purport of the Gospel? how should it mix with any thing which was in them? in one point however, in one single solitary point, it reached the heart of Felix—the inestimable love of God shown in the redemption of the world through his Son Jesus Christ touched him not—the innate corruption of man, which required the sacrifice, past by him as empty air—he recked not of its causes or consequences, for he loved it, he clung to

it—the peace and the bliss of the spirit, which has been cleansed and renewed by the Holy Spirit for Christ's sake, were things which he neither understood, nor cared to understand. Hitherto he was completely armed against every shaft of the Apostle's eloquence. But when to this tyrannical extortioner, to this unprincipled adulterer, to this foul assassin, who could not with all his good will and might shake off the notion of future retribution, which even his corrupt religion had impressed upon his childhood<sup>1</sup>, whose early fears had been constantly kept alive, and notions of punishment practically quickened by the lashes of his master's whip; when to this vile slave, bound in body and in mind, St. Paul preached of righteousness and temperance, and the judgment to come, he trembled. He recognised his old familiar terrors, and the Gospel which could not reach him as a man, came rudely home to him as a slave, and whipped this gilded image of royalty upon his throne. His torture was intolerable. "For this present go, and when I have an opportunity, I will call for thee again," cried the shrinking and affrighted culprit.

Frequent has been the application of this celebrated scene. On slavish minds, and such are all worldly minds, it is only the threats of the Gospel which have any effect. Its love speaks but to the ingenuous and free. They must be compelled, and not invited, must be frightened from evil before they can be turned to good. Hell must open his mouth to devour them, before they will flee heavenward.

<sup>1</sup> Juvenal, Sat. ii. 152.

But this wholesome fear is often too short-lived to produce its good effect. And as by the worthless slave of man, the thought of future punishment is wilfully cast out of mind, through a reckless determination to gratify his present desires, so by the slave of this world, the threats of the Gospel are purposely forgotten, and put away as intruders upon the enjoyment of his lusts. When held up before his eyes by its preacher, they create a momentary uneasiness, even as the sight and shaking of the whip does to the slave. But he will stop his ears from hearing further. His terrified imagination has already gone beyond the preacher, he ejects the tormenting thought, and dismisses him, as far as his attention is concerned, even as Felix dismissed Paul. Alas! there is many a Felix. To all hearts, which are subjected in devoted subserviency to the world, the words of the Gospel are an empty sound. Its threats, however terrifying, are ineffectual. And what sense have they of its promises? What is another world to them who have staked their all on this? What is the freedom from the slavery of sin to them who fondly hug the chains of that slavery? What is its bliss and joy of spirit to them who know not the Spirit? As long as a man has not utterly sold himself under sin, as long as he has left himself any liberty, there is hope. Through that liberty he can communicate with the liberty of the Gospel, and apprehend it. Here it was that principally lay the difference between Felix and Onesimus, as hearers of the Gospel. Perhaps Onesimus, no less than he, had been first roused by the threats of the Gospel. But the chains of the world hung somewhat loose upon

him, and he had still left command of will sufficient to throw them off. Hunger, nakedness, and destitution had rendered him, under God, less dependent on the world. He had still some freedom left, wherewith to meet the freedom of the Gospel, still some love unsquandered, wherewith to meet the love of the Gospel. But Felix was bound hand and foot, and irrevocably sold under sin. His understanding was quite darkened, and alienated from the life of God. He was past feeling<sup>1</sup>.

The subsequent conduct of Felix proves how utterly lost upon him was the warning of the Gospel, how incurable was his profligacy. The pang of guilt was forgotten, and he often sent for Paul, and conversed with him, but not to hear the glad tidings of repentance and forgiveness of sins, but to endeavour to extort money from him as a bribe for his liberty. This money too, of which he thought Paul was possessed, he knew to be not his own, but put into his charge by different Churches for distribution to the poor brethren in Jerusalem. Thus he endeavoured to prevail upon Paul to be a sharer in his own iniquity of speculation and robbery, and probably often pretended a desire to hear the Gospel, when he only wished to sound him with regard to the quantity of the sum of money which he had, and his reluctance or readiness to part with it. He ranks with Ananias and Simon in insulting the Spirit of God, and making the hearing the Gospel an affair of money. For two whole years he thus detained Paul, although he knew his complete inno-

<sup>1</sup> Ephes. iv. 19:

## GALLIO.

A. D. 55.

WE turn from Felix, whom the Gospel could not reach, to one whose bosom seems at first sight to be ground ready prepared by God's preventing grace for receiving its seed ; and yet when the Gospel was offered to him, he received it not. Pilate and Felix move neither our surprise nor sorrow. But Gallio's character has been drawn in glowing colours by men who knew him well. He was universally esteemed and loved ; and yet the love of the Gospel was as ineffectual for him, as its fear for Felix. His is a still more instructive example, as being no uncommon character in well educated society. To all appearance it affords an excellent basis for the structure of the Christian. There is the natural stock of love and kindness on which to engraft the love of Christ. There is the good sense which is best able to appreciate the claims and true object of the Gospel. And there is the good feeling in the heart, which points it out as a fit receptacle of the Temple of Christian purity. And yet too frequently is such a character entirely destitute of vital religion ; it is often accompanied with an easiness of disposition, which is contented to take things as they are : this, while it renders the person popular in society,

keeps him back from going into the spirit of things. He is content to take the outward forms as he finds them, and his popularity diverts his attention still more from the stern and serious realities which form their essence. His conscience is seldom disturbed, for all men praise him, his attention is seldom roused, for every thing pleases him as it comes. Whether the religion of his country be that of ancient Rome, or of modern Rome, or of Protestantism, makes to him not the slightest difference. He professes it merely as being that nearest at hand, and acquiesces in it without the trouble of inquiry. Any thing designedly pressed upon his attention naturally excites his aversion. Hence the great and awful truths of religion seldom come before him in a lovely shape. He shuns its peculiar and stirring doctrines, his love of ease can be satisfied but with Deistical indifference. How dreadful is the penalty which he pays, we may learn from noticing the circumstances under which Gallio demands the Christian reader's attention.

Gallio was the brother of Seneca, and if the praise of man were of any real value, Gallio had been rich indeed. The first philosopher, and the first poet of his day<sup>1</sup> join in his eulogy. Among many excellent qualities the most distinguished is that of his unaffected sweetness. He was appointed to the proconsulship of the province of Achaia, an easy government, and in a country most agreeable to a man of refinement and education. Its scenes were the theme of his history and poetry, and its society was that of philosophers.

<sup>1</sup> The references to Seneca and Statius are given by most commentators.

This captivating leisure was disturbed but by the turbulence and quarrels of the Jews, those contemptible barbarians, as he deemed them, who, abounding in the large cities of that impoverished country, were always a source of vexatious annoyance to the civil power, by the broils both internal, and external, to which their sects and religion exposed them. The character of Gallio more particularly revolted from such intrusions. They forced his attention to a clamorous people and to strange opinions, which, despising already from common report, he was more than ever resolved to overlook. But by this inattention to the duties of his station, he lost the only opportunity of hearing the tidings of the Gospel. Had he done what was required of him, and possessed the curiosity of Felix, he might have ended his investigation with the faith of Sergius Paulus. But he neglected his duty, and lost the treasure which God had placed within his reach. It may be remarked here how commonly God's calls have come to men while they were engaged in the duties of their station. David was feeding his sheep, Saul was searching for his father's asses, Samuel was waiting on Eli, Gideon was thrashing wheat, when the call of the Lord came to them. The fishermen Peter and Andrew, James and John, the tax-gatherer Matthew, were called with the very instruments of their occupation in their hands to the service of the Gospel, and Paul himself was obeying the impulse of a godly <sup>1</sup>, although mistaken zeal, when Christ summoned him to his truly godly work. Had Gallio inquired as he should

<sup>1</sup> Rom. x. 2.

have done, into the complaints which came before him, his name might have swelled this list.

On one of these occasions the Jews came before his tribunal, dragging with them Paul, and accusing him of teaching men to worship God contrary to their law. Paul was opening his lips to reply to the charge, when Gallio, impatient at their harassing him on such a business, rudely said to them, "If it were a matter of wrong, or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: but if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters," and with this he drove them from the judgment-seat. Encouraged by this disregard of the complaint of the Jews, and even presuming from this upon his connivance, the Greeks beat Sosthenes, the chief-ruler of the synagogue, before his face. Gallio was unmoved, he cared for nothing of these things.

Men have taken different views of this conduct of Gallio. Many, both ancient and modern, have praised its moderation and impartiality; but they have looked at it with a tacit reference to the conduct of governors towards Christians, when they had become an object of persecution by the state. But Christianity was not concerned here, as far as Gallio was aware: nor had it yet become so conspicuous as to be the butt of Roman persecution. Had it been so, there is every reason to think that Gallio would not have been more merciful than Pliny. His easiness of disposition would have led him to close in with the temper of the times, which was now incuriosity and contempt. In a few years after,

inquisition and cruelty had their day. And would he have resisted this? Had he more discretion, more humanity than Pliny? Or equal diligence in searching into the truth of a case? This does not appear, but rather the contrary. He was one of those careless easy men whose pliant character is entirely moulded by the times in which they live. The very same temper of mind has often procured for different men in different times, the opposite lots of shame and glory.

Gallio was unquestionably guilty of a gross dereliction of duty. The Jews had as much right to his protection as the Greeks or Romans. And here a case came before his tribunal in which he ought to have seen that one of them was under persecution of the rest. Had he chosen to inquire he might have found that the Jews were violating against Paul both the law of Moses and that of the twelve tables. An outrage was committed before his own eyes which urgently called for his interference, and yet he declined it. It is astonishing that any one can praise him for his protection of the Christians. He neither knew nor cared about them. If leaving the weaker to the mercy of the stronger be protection, he certainly gave it, and Paul and Sosthenes had the full benefit of it. His unaffected sweetness, his uncompromising integrity, which he displayed towards his brother heathen, became angry contempt, and reckless injustice towards the Jew. Like all easy characters, he reserved the benefit of his virtues for those who were within the pale. To all without it, he was reckless of equity. His position in society demanded his regard for the one, but not for the

other, and he was unwilling to have the trouble of regard further than that demanded.

Severely did he pay the penalty of this dereliction of duty. He lost the chance of a prize of inestimable value. Had he interfered as he should have done, and allowed Paul to speak, he might have heard things which would have excited his attention, at least as much as they did that of Felix and Festus. And what was lost on such irreclaimable characters as these might have fallen with effect upon the mind of one who was respected and beloved, by all who knew him, for sweetness of temper, for generosity of disposition, for sterling judgment, for strict integrity<sup>1</sup>. The door of the kingdom of heaven was open to him for a few moments, and then was shut for ever. It closed in the moment that he abandoned his duty. Had he been faithful, it would have continued open, and he might in the end have entered in. It is painful to think of such a crisis in a man's life. It is awful to see the very hinge of the balance, and the arms ascending and descending, bearing the scales of everlasting life, and everlasting death. But death preponderated, and Gallio was included for ever among those upon whom the light and life of the Gospel were never to shine. He never knew what he had lost. That day was never marked in his calendar, for evil or for good. It had no place in his memory, for remorse or for exultation. Alas! poor ignorant! it was his doomsday; and such a day may there be to the careless Christian. The neglect of some duty may

<sup>1</sup> Seneca.

shut him out from the perception of that call which God may have attached to its performance. A treasure may have been laid on the spot where he ought to have been : but he was not there. An angel may have called at his door : but he was not within. Neither knows he what he has lost ; but at the last day he will know. Oh, how should we watch every moment and hour, and keep continually in the highway of God's blessings by continually doing his service, according to that station which he hath appointed us in Jesus Christ. This road is strewn with gifts of grace and mercy. Here we walk with God. We know not what we have lost if we divert for a moment from this direction ; and yet how little think we of such sad consequences of sins of omission. They present not that positive bodily shape which sins of commission do. Their expression is not an act, but the absence of an act. We therefore are apt to underrate their magnitude both in the perception and in the memory, and still less seriously consider their results ; happy we if they startle us from our slumber.

But in another point too many Christians resemble Gallio. The church of God came before him, and he knew it not, neither recked to know. And are there none, who, professing to be Christians, are equally indifferent to a true knowledge of the Church of Christ ? None, who deem it no business of theirs to inform themselves of its doctrine and discipline, but, calling all a question of words and names, leave its truth to be overwhelmed by the clamours of superstition and infidelity : who treat all which it reveals as a collection of dogmas, which

because they unfortunately are held or rejected, some here and some there, may therefore be safely regarded by any one with indifference? Such may profess Christianity: but their true creed is Gallionism. Too often are such persons endowed, like Gallio, with qualities which render them estimable in society, and in the full tide of worldly reputation they think not of their spiritual emptiness of heart. Among these the Church has often found its most dangerous enemies. Their easiness of temper complies with whatever is at hand, and therefore they have no fixed principles: while their character gives them a weight to which they have no title. Pampered by the delights and applause of society, they are unwilling to perceive in the Gospel any thing disagreeable to their worldly and comfortable notions. Its particularities are troublesome to their attention. Its demands are too great for their self-indulgence. Its threats are hostile to their ease. Its peace they imagine that they have already. To them therefore the Gospel is all generality. It is a mere moral code. They think that there is no sin but in the positive violation of morality, and that doctrine, right or wrong, is a mere question of names, for which no one is responsible. Thus they go on at their ease day after day, declining the duties of the station where Christ has placed them in his Church, and losing, by that declining, the opportunities which he supplies as oil to their lamp of faith. They are worse than he who went and hid his talent in a napkin, for they have forgotten that they had ever received a talent. Yet as surely as Gallio had his

commission from Cæsar, they have theirs from Christ. As surely as justice was demanded at the seat of Gallio, so is it at theirs. They may refuse to enter into the case, they may superciliously put it off as a question of words and names. But the wrong which they might have corrected will rise up against them at the judgment-seat of the last day. They may care for none of these things, and may look idly on, perfectly unconcerned in the momentous religious disputes of the day, though they press into their presence, appear at the bar of their judgment and conscience, and call aloud for them to interfere. They may care for none of these things. But there is One that careth, and he will not suffer himself to be so ill served with impunity. Gallio may have safely betrayed the trust of the distant, the careless, the corrupt Cæsar. But will they as safely betray the trust of the all-seeing, all-present, all-requiring, ever-watchful, holy, and mighty Jesus? It was in the power of Cæsar to degrade Gallio from the high post which he had betrayed. It is in the will of Jesus to degrade all unworthy occupiers from their thrones in his Church. Their degradation may not be openly displayed to the world in which they outwardly move. There they may still appear in their usual trappings, and retain the golden opinions of men. But in the inward world of spirit the process of their degradation goes on. There is stripped off from them their spiritual raiment, there is broken their staff of office. The abused graces, the unemployed talents are snatched one by one from their hands. Their lamps are quenched, their crowns are

taken away. They are pronounced incapable of further service: and angels and blessed spirits look on and weep.

The character of the profitable servant of Christ is the very reverse of Gallio's. He cares for every thing, the very least, which comes before his eyes. As the great apostle of the Gentiles came in humble guise before the proconsul, so the Christian knows not how important a messenger may come before him in the most common daily incident. He is, therefore, ever ready and watchful lest he should lose what God hath sent to prove his diligence, try his judgment, and move his services. Had Gallio examined as he should, he would have found the Gospel. The Christian on examining gains a deeper and deeper insight into it, he sees further into the heap of the unsearchable riches of God, he discerns more clearly the end of his ways which are past finding out. All is contemplated in one vast unity, and his heart and head are supplied with that perfect fulness to their wants which God alone can bestow. Let Gallio often recur to mind. He represents in his conduct our least obtrusive and most dangerous infirmity, and supplies us with thoughts which may forewarn us, and prevent us from being surprised on a day for which we were unprepared.

## SIMEON.

B. C. 4.

It is difficult for the most lively imagination, however well supplied with the food of facts, and however excited by their singular grandeur, to depicture adequately the situation of the whole civilized world about the time of our Saviour's birth. The Jew saw lying in ruins the third monarchy prophesied by Daniel. He counted the seventy prophetic weeks, and they were fast running out. His countrymen, scattered in large bodies throughout the cities of Asia and Africa, communicated to the heathen their curiosity and agitation, so that the whole eastern world was standing up in breathless and throbbing expectation, and looking out for him who was to come. The notions of the heathen were of course but vague and carnal. But among the Jews they were of very different degrees of spirituality. The gross and blind vulgar looked to but a carnal deliverer from their carnal subjection to the infidel. The priesthood would naturally contain two extreme parties, both the most carnally minded, and the most spiritually minded of these expectants. Being the appointed mediators between God and the Jew, the interests of the priests were especially concerned. If the Messiah was to be in any way a

temporal deliverer, then would they be his nobles and satraps. If he was to be a purely spiritual Saviour, it followed by no obscure deduction that their occupation would be at an end. When we consider the dreadful degeneracy of the Jews at this time, we may readily conclude, and the whole tenor of the Gospels confirms the conclusion, that the latter was a very small party indeed, and kept under, and held down with a curb of silence by the violence of the other. The precise nature of the opinions of this minority it is difficult to determine. But the exceeding soreness which the other party always manifested upon any expression which bore upon the continuance of their temple<sup>1</sup>, seems to show that this had been disputed and denied: and the prophecies which led to the spiritual view would carry on their readers to that unpopular opinion. The song of Simeon gives us the only trace of these spiritual notions among the Jews. Nor need we wonder. They could not be openly propounded among men who looked for the Messiah to set his seal upon their corrupt tradition and practice: who deemed that the Prince of Peace should give them peace by putting to peace every mouth that should dare to open against their corruptions, and give peace to earth by turning the land of the Gentiles into a desert: who were thus prepared, even before he came, for crucifying the Lord of glory.

So little, and so affrighted was the flock to which Simeon belonged. It was the only flock of God upon earth. It alone was alive in the spirit. All

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xxxi. 61. Acts vi. 14.

the rest of the nation was dead in the letter. They did not ruminate over the political slavery of their country, and call for a deliverer. They felt the oppression of the yoke, and the festering of the rankling chains of sin. They did not gaze at the huge foundations of the temple, and admire it as built for the palace of an everlasting Prince. They did not number its offerings and count its treasures. They did not cast an ambitious eye at the vast bodies of their countrymen planted already like armies throughout the fairest regions of the heathen, and prepared to raise the banner at the moment of the Redeemer's appearance. But they thought of spiritual temples, of spiritual treasures, of spiritual companies of preachers. Daily they resorted to the temple where Malachi had promised the appearance of him whom they looked for. There they put up their prayers for the coming of the consolation of Israel, and as the fated term came nearer they redoubled their watching and prayer. The more deeply they meditated, and the nearer the time came, the more they felt the want and the desire. Their prayers were a delightful expression of confidence in God's promises, to which on their wings they soared, and apprehended them. Daily they thus laid hold of them, and daily thus prepared their minds for his coming, that he may find them a people ready equipped for his service.

In such expectation and preparation the faithful Simeon had now passed a long life. He was not impatient for the day of the Lord, yet he earnestly desired to see it. His term of life seemed now likely to coincide with the accomplishment of the prophecy,

and he naturally felt an intense wish to see the hope of a long life realized before he died. There was nothing carnal in this. The best men like to behold with their own eyes those who have been long the object of their thoughts. They long to see their benefactor personally. They delight to pour out their whole heart in blessing and thanksgiving in his presence, to kindle their love afresh at the light of his countenance, to hang upon the mouth which speaks such comfort and gladness, to look into the eyes which beam with such love and kindness, and to kiss the hand which hath wrought for them such wondrous salvation. However assured by faith, which is the hope of things not seen, yet it is most comfortable to see the seal of ratification set to that hope. No one ever hoped for a thing which he did not wish to be present. Who does not at this day earnestly wish that the coming of the kingdom of the Lord for which he daily prays, may be in his own lifetime? and the greater reason which he has for thinking it near at hand the more ardently does he desire it, and long to see it before he die; the more does he grudge the loss of that short interval which may elapse between his own departure and the Lord's coming. It will indeed be all one and the same when the grave shall have closed over him; then at any rate he will see his Lord and Master face to face, and enjoy that palpable communion which was denied him on earth. Yet neither can he nor should he forego that natural feeling. Heartiness is a fundamental quality in the Gospel. While we are in the flesh we must obey its natural impulses, only regulating them by the Gospel. Cold philo-

sophical abstraction is widely different from Christian spirituality.

While he was one day thus looking forward with anxious hope, the Holy Ghost announced to him that he should not see death before he saw the Lord's Christ. How great must have been the joy of this faithful servant at so gracious an annunciation. It was a seal set of approval upon his long and unwearied expectation. He had kept his loins girt and his lights burning, and was to receive his Master at last. Perhaps the Holy Spirit, in imparting to him this prophetic grace, revealed to him, as to the most favoured prophets of old, a more spiritual view of the nature of the kingdom of Christ. How unsubstantial then would all things appear around him. All the rites at which he assisted were but as the voice of a person 'unseen indeed, but approaching. Still more eager did they make him for his arrival, and more closely than ever would he keep his watch in the temple for his coming. It is impossible to conceive a more happy or honourable station than that which the Holy Spirit had now assigned to Simeon. He was the last link of a chain of prophetic saints which stretched from Adam. They all saw at a distance, but he was to touch. Their song spake of the Christ to come, but his should hail Christ already come, and offer him the first-fruits of the homage of the saints to the end of the world.

The promised day came at last ; the Holy Ghost again visited Simeon, and advertised him that the Lord, for whom he was looking, had come to his temple : he immediately rose, and full of the Spirit entered the temple. There Mary was waiting with

her child to offer up the customary sacrifice, and to present him to the Lord. In that child he immediately recognized the Saviour of the world, and taking him up into his arms, burst forth into a hymn of praise and thanksgiving. He blessed God for having allowed him to see his Saviour, and professed his willingness to die now that he had seen him. With a heavenly comprehension of view, with which the Spirit afterwards especially interfered to endow the apostles, he acknowledged the Christ to be not only the glory of Israel, but also a light for the enlightening the Gentiles. He saw in him the Redeemer of the whole world, and foretold to Mary his rejection by many in Israel, his being made a public mark for reproach and mockery, and obscurely hinted his sufferings and death, in assuring her that "a sword should pierce through her own soul, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

With this hymn this faithful servant and unwearied waiter upon his Lord quits the stage of history. A tradition says that with this he quitted life too. In his last strain this prophet has bequeathed to the Church a song, which has often been repeated from the mouths of dying martyrs, and by saintly men who deeply felt the inestimable privilege of having lived under the Gospel. Of this privilege our Church reminds us, by putting this very hymn into our mouths after we have heard the reading of the word of eternal life in Jesus Christ. O that we could ever bear it in mind, and take it uninterruptedly to heart; that we could steadily discern the distinctness of our calling, and strive to make it sure by being chosen. For are we not called, who are so few out

of the whole mass of mankind? Could we count the number of those who have died, who are living, and who shall be born to live without the knowledge of the Gospel, we, who have heard its blessed tidings, would appear in the comparison but as a little knot of persons, like Simeon and Anna amid the unbelieving throngs of Jerusalem. May we be then like Simeon and Anna in their esteem of the blessedness to which we have been called. Who are we, that we should have been so highly favoured, and that to our eyes and ears should have been revealed things which Abraham, and David, and the prophets, were not allowed to witness, vehemently though they desired it? Who are we, that to us should be manifested in all the fulness of accomplished redemption, in his sacrifice on the cross, in his resurrection from the dead, in his ascension to heaven, in the assurance of his intercession there by the descent of the Holy Ghost, that Saviour whom Simeon beheld but as a helpless infant, and was thankful that he had seen so much? Great indeed is our blessedness, great indeed our responsibility. Let us, like the author of this hymn, humbly and cheerfully in our respective stations await the coming of the Lord, in whatever shape it may appear, whether by the intervention of sorrow or of joy, at whatever time, whether at even, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning<sup>1</sup>, that we be not found sleeping, but ready, so that with our last breath we may be enabled to cry out, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiii. 35.

Simeon sang the first hymn with which mortal lips saluted the Redeemer's arrival. It followed the song of the angels. It will gain force and signification with every fresh unfolding of the veil which yet remains upon the fortunes of the Church, and will only lose its application at that awful day, when the quick shall see the coming of the Son of Man in power and great glory to raise the dead, and judge mankind, and the song of angels shall once again be heard upon earth, singing Hallelujah, never again to be succeeded by song of mortal man. For there shall be no more departure from life, and all eyes shall see their Saviour face to face, never to lose the sight of him again, but to gaze upon him, and enjoy the brightness of his glory for ever.

## ZECHARIAH AND STEPHEN.

B. C. 840—A. D. 34.

How different is the feeling with which we read the words and deeds of the martyrs from that which accompanies the consideration of all other characters. That which comes nearest to it is our regard to the memory of the hero who died for his and our country. We admire his high spirit and courage, we venerate him for his wisdom, we love him for his kinder qualities, especially for the love which he bore to his country, we pity him for his short date of life, we are stirred as with the sound of a trumpet at the story of his mighty deeds, and these feelings are rendered still more lively by the insinuation into them of our personal vanity, which is gratified at being fellow-countrymen of such a man. Yet our sympathy is exceedingly imperfect. If we gaze with a reverential fervour upon his mouldering sword and surcoat, which, with his rusty casque and tattered banner, are hung over his tomb, yet these aspirations soon make way for a sigh upon the vanity of this world. Not only the rust and rags of these monuments teach us the frailty of every thing earthly, but their very fashion also forcibly reminds us how completely his age is gone by, how very different are the times in which we are living. It is with

difficulty that we can trace, down to ourselves in an uninterrupted tissue of reflection, the benefits which he acquired for his country. Still more hard do we find it, amid such striking contrarieties from without, to associate our feelings with his. But the martyr died for an universal, an everlasting country, of which the fashions, the principles, the laws, and therefore the feelings, are the same throughout all nations and all generations of nations to the end of the world. The crown of glory which he has acquired is imperishable; and when we look upon his tomb, we think not of his bones below, but of his spirit above. The cross set over his tomb is a symbol of everlasting form and meaning, which preaches to the inmost heart. The cause in which he fell is not only just and honourable before man, but approved and precious before God. And it is one to which we ourselves are bound in common with him in its most minute particularities, in particular weapon, particular armour, particular interest, particular friend, particular foe, particular king; and not only have we in common with him, but we are one with him, and he with us: the same spirit fills us, we look not on one who had once the same breath of life which we now have, but on one who has the same breath of everlasting life at this moment; who is in the same communion of saints with ourselves. Our sense of obligation to him is exalted by the consideration that he was the chosen instrument of the Most High God to call us into the blessedness of the membership of his eternal city. And the greater our advance in holiness, the greater is our sympathy with him, the more do we love him, and bless his memory. Per-

haps he has left not only his memory, but also his spirit, embodied in burning words of light, among us. And then how does his unfilled chair or empty pulpit (should such relics remain) present him to us, and his very words rise up and glow within our hearts. Great therefore is the benefit of contemplating the characters of our martyrs; our best and holiest feelings are roused. They are our illustrious fathers, we their emulous children. Nor though they may have been of the infant church, sons of the circumcision, subjected to figure and type, are we left without exceeding interest and instruction. They stood up and fell in essentially the same cause as that in which we are standing. Their imperfect light, which is as a spark to our blaze, excites at once our affectionate pity, and a self-abasement at the thought of our own unworthiness of enjoying the substance of which they beheld but the shadow. We are strongly moved to make good, with the help of our God and Lord Jesus Christ, the inestimable and unmerited advantage which he hath given us.

In the list of this glorious army the most conspicuous names under the two covenants are those of Zechariah and Stephen. The one is the last prophet whose mal-treatment is recorded in the Jewish Scripture; the other is the first preacher of Christ that suffered death for his name's sake. The death of the one was among those national crimes which brought on the fall of the first temple; the death of the other helped equally to work the irremediable overthrow of the second. It is instructive to consider them together. Both their likeness and their contrast is striking.

Zechariah was the son of Jehoiada, the high-priest who was so instrumental in restoring the worship of Jehovah after a long reign of shocking idolatry. As long as the feeble-minded king Joash was under his tutelage, the true religion prospered; the ruinous temple was repaired; the plundered vessels were replaced: the usual sacrifices were restored. But no sooner had this faithful servant closed his eyes, than the old abominations returned; the princes of Judah left the house of God, and served groves and idols, and Joash hearkened unto them. God, however, in his infinite mercy and long-suffering, bore with them so patiently as to send prophets to bring them back to him, and warn them of the grievous offence which they were committing; but they heeded not, neither cared to understand. At last he sent his Holy Spirit upon Zechariah, whom his father had pledged by his very name to remember God. He went to the temple, which was again suffering under idolatrous defilement, and standing on the steps of the court of the priests, so as to be above the people in the outer court, opened to them his commission: "Thus saith God, (he cried), Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? Because ye have forsaken the Lord, he hath also forsaken you." Enraged at this rebuke, and gladly obeying the orders of their unthankful king, they rushed upon him, and pursuing him, as he retreated, to the altar of burnt offerings, there, at that holy seat of mercy and atonement, and between it and the temple, they stoned and slew him. The prophet with his dying breath continued the words of his commission: "The Lord

look upon it and require it," he cried. He cried not for vengeance, but he uttered the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and plainly told them that his death was the crown and clearest manifestation of those sins for which the Lord had forsaken them. He pronounced God's vengeance on the enemies of God, not on his own. He was moved with a zeal for the vindication of his honour and glory, which were never more insulted than now, when he, a prophet of the true God, was dying the death of an idolator<sup>1</sup>, at the hand of apostates, within the very temple. His last words, therefore, whether we take them as an announcement or as prayer, are in true keeping with his commission, which was to denounce the enemies of the Lord. How should he pray for those whom the Lord had sent him to denounce; and how should he not pray for the accomplishment of God's revealed purpose? God fulfilled the words of his faithful servant. Within the very same year the host of Syria came up and destroyed all the princes of the people; and soon after Joash himself paid the penalty of the violent death of the prophet by his own violent death.

Stephen was one of those Jews who were born among the heathen, and spoke their language, and, where it was indifferent, conformed to their habits. On this account they were much undervalued by their brethren of Judea; and hence arose that slight which gave rise to the election of Stephen, with six others, who were to minister to the necessities of their overlooked brethren. With this high testimony of the Church to his character, Stephen makes his

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xiii. 10; xvii. 5.

first appearance before us ; and there is something wondrously moving in the spectacle of the youthful Neophyte marching so quickly to the deadly encounter, and triumphing so gloriously. Like the infant which dies soon after its birth, he was early taken away to bliss and glory. Yet his short career must have been marked with exceeding zeal and knowledge, that he should have been selected by the enemies of the truth as their most formidable opponent. He was filled with faith and power, and did great wonders and miracles among the people. In addition to these gifts which his Master had promised to his faithful preachers, he received from him, in his time of need, the promised gift of a mouth and wisdom which all his adversaries were not able to gainsay nor resist<sup>1</sup>. They were not able, we are told, to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke : they had then recourse to the usual arts of the discomfited children of perdition, which they learn from their father, who stands accusing the brethren night and day. Misrepresentation, calumny, and perjury were employed against him ; and the same charge of speaking against the temple which had been brought against his Lord, was brought also against him. How content must he thus have been to suffer for Christ's sake. What a testimony was here both to the power and the truth of his preaching. If his Master appeared personally at the end of this servant's ministry, he did also spiritually from the beginning. With this charge his accusers hurried him before the high-priest. In his presence he maintained

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxi. 15.

the same bold and high bearing, undaunted by the assembly of the wise, and learned, and powerful of his nation. He was conscious of the presence of the great High-Priest; he knew that the angels of heaven were looking on. In his address he went through a summary of the Jewish history, showing God's free mercies to the nation, and the return which it made by rebellion and idolatry. He showed them, among other apostacies, how their fathers had forsaken the tabernacle of Jehovah, and taken up the tabernacle of Moloch. This brought him to the mention of the temple, which they, although no longer idolators, yet regarded with a carnality little short of idolatry<sup>1</sup>. With the usual abuse of superstition, they confined God's presence on earth to that favoured spot, and only there thought of the purity necessary for appearing before him; nowhere else did they reckon of his eye. Here too, of course, it consisted but in outward rites and oblations. In vain had prophets been sent from God to recall them to more spiritual notions; they persecuted and slew them, both them who spoke of the coming of the Just One, and the Just One himself. Their menaces during this latter part of his speech, when he came to the subject of the temple, were very significant, and perhaps drew him to dilate more at large on their resistance to God's will; he saw that he himself was shortly to be added to the number of God's maltreated messengers, and burst out into that indignant apostrophe, "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised of heart, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your

<sup>1</sup> See the Epistle of Barnabas, chap. xvi.

fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have now been the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the dispensation of angels, and have not kept it." On this the rage of his hearers became excessive; they were cut to the heart. Stephen, seeing them gnashing on him with their teeth, and aware of what was preparing for him, lifted his heart above all earthly fears, and, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked stedfastly into heaven: there he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. Possessed with the blessed sight, he cried out, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." The application to Jesus (for so they could not but understand it) of that high title, which, when Jesus himself made, the high-priest rent his clothes as at blasphemy, and pronounced sentence of death, was also fatal to his faithful servant. Stopping their ears as at shocking blasphemy, they rushed upon him, dragged him out of the city, and stoned him, while he was invoking Jesus in the same prayer in which he himself had invoked the Father from the cross, saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my soul." He knelt down to receive his death, and, crying out "Lord! lay not this sin to their charge," fell asleep.

In comparing the circumstances of the death of this blessed proto-martyr with those which attended Zechariah's, the first thing which strikes us is their different fruits. A mournful solitude and barrenness surrounds the fate of Zechariah. We are not told of

any bright vision which cheered him ; and his blood seems to have flowed in vain ; to have been shed as seed upon barren sand. He had no followers ; his death was the herald of the destruction of his country, but wrought no spiritual regeneration. It prophesied the downfall of the law ; but Stephen's helped the rising of the Gospel. His blood fell on the fat soil of God's vineyard of the Church, and among his murderers was its future most efficient apostle. The death of Zechariah drove the faithful servants of God to hiding-places and silence ; but that of Stephen, by scattering his companions, sent preachers of the Word into all corners of the world. The blow in the one case drove the waters, as in a circumscribed pool, to break fruitlessly upon the shingle ; but in the other, like the impression of the heavenly bodies on the wide ocean, it sent the waters rolling away in every direction to far distant regions. The end of Stephen is no less contrasted with Zechariah's than its effects. It is full of exulting triumph ; it partakes of the splendour of Elijah's ascension. Here is no dark and mournful solitude ; the glory of God which had guided Israel, which surrounded Christ upon the mount, which formed his chariot of ascent into heaven, is revealed to his eyes amid the opening heavens, and in the midst of it appears the triumphant Saviour, ready to receive into bliss the departing spirit of his servant. The death of Zechariah was that of a true son of the Lion of Judah ; he resisted unto blood, and died amid struggling defiance, and in the bold utterance of the commission of denunciation with which he had been charged : " The Lord look upon it, and require it." But the death of

Stephen is that of a follower of the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. He fell asleep with the words, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," upon his lips. His last words were nearly those of the blessed Lamb himself, who cried, "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do." Both suffered most cruel injustice at the hands of their fellow-countrymen, dying the death of idolators for declaring the will and word of the only and ever-living God. But a shade of melancholy overspreads the martyrdom of Zechariah, and a gladness relieves the gloom of Stephen's. Stephen was still in communion with his fellow-countrymen, and when he came into the temple, worshipped the same God, joined in the same prayer, partook of the same sacrifice. But Zechariah, when he came into the temple, found none but apostates; saw the altars of God overthrown, and the courts thronged with the votaries of Moloch and Baal. Stephen had to complain of their corrupting the law; Zechariah of their abolishing it. Stephen spoke to men who abused their knowledge; Zechariah to those who had cast it away. Stephen spoke to men, many of whom, perhaps, and most assuredly at least one, had the zeal of God, though not the true knowledge. But Zechariah to a throng who, in despite of late signal mercies, had, with their king at their head, conspicuously abandoned him, displaying thus an utter debasement of mind, a serpent-like ingratitude, a fiendish malignity. Stephen therefore might hope for converts; Zechariah could hope for none. Stephen's blood therefore fell like dew, watering and fattening; but Zechariah's was as that of Abel's, crying for ven-

geance<sup>1</sup>, and fell on the floor of the temple like the showers of brimstone and fire upon Sodom.

Glorious is the example of these blessed martyrs ; and yet perhaps the critical agony of their conflict is not before us. The real fight has been well nigh finished by the time that it affects the flesh. The sword, the axe, the stake, are brute and blunt weapons, the pain of which reaches not the mind. O there is the real fight, there the deadly struggle of heaven and hell for everlasting possession. The gain and loss of fame, of friends, of fortune, the fear of wrath, and mockery, and revilings, the dread of breaking up honourable and closely entwined affections, the reluctance to withdraw long reposed confidence, the willingness to retain well-earned friendship and esteem, the clinging to the wonted comfort of embraces, and smiles, and kind words : these and many more are the combatants. This is the fight that tears and tortures the soul ; when the martyr is led forth to die, it has ceased. All is peace within him. Christ hath conquered ; the crown of glory is woven.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxiii. 35.

## BARNABAS.

A. D. 45.

PRINCES have continually been gratified with proud titles from their fellow-men, and flattery has exhausted its vocabulary. "Great," "bold," "good," "conqueror," "deliverer," "confessor," and many terms more, have soothed both their carnal and their spiritual pride; and subjects, in their turn, have received titles of honour from their prince, and borne them, however empty and unmeaning, with boasting exultation. But since the day that our Lord gave to Simon the title of Peter, and to James and John, that of Boanerges, never was there conferred on man a more honourable name than that which the apostles imposed on Joses. They called him Barnabas, that is, "Son of consolation and exhortation." What a pregnant meaning is here! What a glorious title for a minister of Christ! It was won by battles and victories, not over the bodies, but the spirits of men, and was bestowed by those who never bestowed any thing in vain. It is with this honourable surname that this disciple is first introduced to our notice and on an occasion well suited to it. In making a fund for the poor, which was to be at the disposal of the apostles, Joses (whom we will henceforward call Barnabas), a Levite and native of Cyprus, having

land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. Thus he comes before us at once as a true servant of Christ, having gone and sold all that he had, and given to the poor. Verily he had treasure in heaven<sup>1</sup>. So sure, so clear, was his faith in Christ, that he laid up with him, not only the treasures of the life to come, which men not having in possession are ready enough to do, but also the treasures of the life now being, of which they hardly desire to forego the use. Had not tradition assured us that he was one of the seventy disciples of our Lord, we should have concluded that he was one of the throng of provincial Jews who had gone up according to custom to attend the great festivals, and had thus become a convert of the apostles. In either case he gave up his country and friends, and, leaving father and mother, and sister and brother, for Christ's sake, made the Church of Christ his country, and him and his apostles his friends. His services and employment at this time are designated, as we have seen, by his name. But he was shortly destined to have a partner, with whose name his own should stand in company for ever in the records of the book of life. Saul, the grievous persecutor of the Church had been miraculously called by Christ to his service. But although three years had passed<sup>2</sup>, yet so fresh and deep was the impression which he had left behind him, that when he came up to Jerusalem, seeking communion with the Church, none of the brethren would trust him. They did not know but that he was feigning, and had come among them with a deep

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xix. 21.<sup>2</sup> Gal. i. 18.

and malignant design to betray them. But Barnabas was of a kindred spirit, ardent, frank, and fearless. He generously stepped forward from the shrinking crowd, took him by the hand, and introduced him to the apostles. Thus most characteristically began a holy friendship, which never was, and never will be dissolved. A friendship begun in Christ is beyond the reach of earthly accident. The affections which support it are daily more and more chastised, and the passions which tend to sever it are daily held under a tighter and tighter curb. It grows with spiritual growth. Two spirits are on their way to one end, and their courses converge nearer and nearer as they approach the goal. Earthly interests, which set up the bars of flesh between them, daily fade away, and they see each other more clearly, and provoke each other with a more lively rivalry.

But the sphere of Barnabas was soon to be very much extended. The persecution in which Stephen fell, scattered preachers of the Gospel far and wide. They extended their range even to Antioch, and not only Jews but Gentiles also of that great and luxurious capital received their tidings with joy. When this was told to the apostles at Jerusalem, they resolved to send one with sufficient authority to lay the foundations of a church there. The Son of Consolation would first occur to their minds, as best suited for such a charge. To preach to the Gentiles required from a Jew no ordinary qualities. It required more than common strength of mind, an energy of more than common liveliness, to surmount the bar of prejudice which the law had set between them, so that on one hand the Jew should preach

without holding back something, and on the other the Gentile should respect the preacher. The mutual contempt which existed between them could only thus be overcome. Peter began the work, but did not proceed in it. A character such as Paul's was necessary to it : and such Barnabas was, although in an inferior degree. When he arrived at Antioch, he was much delighted at seeing the effects of God's grace there, and immediately entered upon his charge of exhortation, calling upon all to cleave unto the Lord in the purpose of their heart. Being so good a man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith, he won over much people to the Lord, insomuch that he found it necessary to look out for a partner in his labours. He immediately bethought him of Saul, and having sought him in Cilicia, where he was preaching<sup>1</sup>, and found him at Tarsus, brought him back with him to Antioch. The work of the ministry of the word of God now went on with redoubled speed. Saul and Barnabas laboured together a whole year, and their success is very significantly told us in the simple observation of St. Luke, that here the disciples were first named Christians. This term shows that the Church of Antioch had even attracted the notice of the supercilious and incurious Roman<sup>2</sup>. He looked with a scoff indeed (as the name shows), and passed on. Little did he think that this despised religion should

<sup>1</sup> Gal. i. 21.

<sup>2</sup> The termination shows that it was not imposed by Greeks, and of course it was not given by the Jews, who denied Jesus to be Christ, and called his followers Nazarenes.

entirely supplant his own. Neither was the Church hidden in the lowest ranks of society ; it was enabled to raise a contribution, and send relief to the poor brethren of Judæa, who were both distressed by a famine, and suffering much both in person and in property from the persecution of the ecclesiastical government, which was then seconded by the powers of the civil. Thus did Barnabas lay the foundations of the first Gentile Church. Alas ! where is it now ?

With this contribution, which was the first-fruits of those which the Gentile churches afterwards were in the habit of remitting, as dutiful children, to the mother Church of Jerusalem, Barnabas and Saul went up to Jerusalem. They found it under grievous persecution. Peter himself was in prison, or had lately escaped, and left the place. Having fulfilled their trust, and taking with them Mark, the son of Mary, in whose house the Church met, and nephew of Barnabas<sup>1</sup>, they returned to Antioch. The Church there was now well supplied with an efficient ministry ; besides themselves were Simeon, that was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaëu, all prophets and teachers. It pleased, therefore, the Holy Spirit to transfer the services of Saul and Barnabas, and employ them where they were more especially required. In the midst of prayer and fasting, he signified to the Church that they should separate Saul and Barnabas for the work whereunto he had called them. Accordingly, when they had fasted and prayed, they ordained them to the charge by imposition of hands, and dismissed them.

<sup>1</sup> Col. iv. 10.

Antioch thus became the metropolis of Gentile Christianity, whence Saul and Barnabas, as colonizers, taking Mark with them as their deacon, set forth to found churches throughout the heathen world. They first of all descended to Seleucia, which served as the port to Antioch, and thence sailed to Cyprus. Here Barnabas was in his native land, and might reasonably expect success both among and by means of his kinsfolk. They made, however, in addition, a conversion, which was the earnest and first-fruits of the harvest of kings and governors that was to come in the train of Constantine. Sergius Paulus, the proconsul, became a believer. Having thus surely established the Gospel, they sailed to the continent, and landing in Pamphylia, went up to the capital of the province, which was Perga. Barnabas had the mortification of being deserted at this point by Mark. The youth had not yet learned to put his hand to the plough, and not look back. He did look back to Jerusalem with a longing heart. His mother was there, from whom perhaps he had never been separated before by any considerable interval of time or place. He had not yet acquired the resolution to leave all things, and hate even father and mother for Christ's sake. Perhaps, too, he shrank from the prominence in which he was now placed, as a mark for persecution, which he could not but see was at hand. He had seen it in Jerusalem, safe in his humble station, and now he trembled at the conspicuous place in which it would find him, and select him out. Like his master Peter, the future Evangelist, and founder of the Church of Alexandria, was destined to bequeath to the Church a warning example of

human weakness. From Perga the two holy missionaries went to Antioch of Pisidia, where Paul preached in the synagogue with such effect, that on the next Sabbath following nearly the whole city met to hear the word of God. But here they encountered the first brunt of that blind and desperate opposition which the unbelieving Jews made to the preaching of the Gospel. It ended in Paul and Barnabas abandoning them to their fate. They shook off the dust of their feet against them, and went still further up into the country to Iconium. Nevertheless they had left behind them a flock of Christ among the heathen, which was filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. At Iconium they had similar success, and encountered the same persecution, so that they quitted it for Lystra. Here they had a different spirit to contend with. Paul miraculously healed a man who had been lame from his birth. The multitude, struck with wonder, immediately supposed that their gods, Jupiter and Mercury, were visiting them, and it was with difficulty that the Apostles prevented them from offering adoration and sacrifice. God was indeed come to them, but, alas! they knew him not. They mistook his servants for him, as their fathers had done when they set up their idolatrous worship. By this time their old persecutors, the Jews, having heard of their success, came up from Antioch and Iconium, and raised a riot against them, in which Paul, being particularly singled out, on account of his former zeal for Moses and his present for Christ, was stoned by the crowd, and left by them for dead. The disciples surrounded him, and he revived, and was enabled next day to go with

Barnabas to Derbe. Having preached the Gospel here, they finished their circuit, and returned upon their old foot-track through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the brethren, and ordaining elders in every Church, until they came to Attalia, the great port-town of Pamphylia, and hence they took shipping straightway for Antioch. Thus they fulfilled the mission of the Holy Ghost, and having assembled the Church, gave an account of all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Still they had not done with Jewish troubles. They awaited them now not only from without the Church, but even from within. Certain Jews of the Pharisaic sect came down from Jerusalem, and insisted on the circumcision of the Gentiles as a condition necessary to their salvation. Paul and Barnabas contended strenuously against such a doctrine; if allowed, they themselves had all along been guilty of insincerity to the Gentiles, they had broken faith with them, inasmuch as they had brought them into the fold by holding out to them the liberty in Christ, and had carefully kept out of view the bonds of the Law. All their first labour was vain, and all their future without hope. Their old converts would quit the Church in crowds, and no new converts would come in. It was all over with the cause of Christianity among the Gentiles. Their opponents, however, insisted, and there remained but one resource, which was to refer the dispute to the Apostles and Elders of Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas were chosen as the deputies. The event we have already seen. It was on this occasion that the chief Apostles

there, James, Peter, and John, being assured of the divine commission of Paul and Barnabas, by which they had preached the word so widely and effectually in Asia, gave them the right hand of fellowship, and agreed that they should discharge towards the Gentiles the same mission which they themselves were executing towards the Jews. Thus their visit was fruitful indeed. They not only received the seal to their Apostleship, but also carried back glad tidings for the Gentiles. We can scarcely imagine any thing more gratifying, either to themselves or others, than the message which they had to convey. Their own good faith was safe, and their hearers, relieved at last from their anxious suspense, were affected with exceeding joy. The Church at Antioch grew daily more flourishing, and its ministry received an accession of strength in Judas and Silas, who were prophets, and exhorted and confirmed the brethren.

The storm, however, was not completely allayed. Peter had come down to Antioch, and lived in free intercourse with the Gentiles. Shortly there came down from Jerusalem the usual disturbers of the peace of the Gentile churches, and these bigotted Pharisaic disciples quite overbore both Peter and Barnabas. Perhaps here was laid the foundation of the misunderstanding, which soon after ensued between Paul and Barnabas. After they had continued at Antioch for some time, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord with the aid of many others, Paul proposed to Barnabas that they should revisit the Churches which they had founded in their late journey. Barnabas gladly assented. But when he proposed to take with them Mark, who

had deserted them on the former occasion, he was met with a direct refusal. Without doubt, he would not have made the proposal, had he not been assured of Mark's sincere repentance, and received his humble and hearty confession, and witnessed all the signs of deep contrition. He, therefore, was anxious to relieve his burdened mind by such an outlet, and to give him the much desired opportunity of repairing his error. The subsequent conduct of Mark proves that Barnabas was not deceived in him, and quite acquits the uncle of being led away by the natural partiality of affection for his nephew. He who had abandoned country, and fortune, and friends for Christ's sake, was not likely now to sacrifice his cause to the gratification of his relations. But on the other hand St. Paul was undoubtedly right in his refusal. He could not have the same pledge of the sincerity of Mark's repentance that Barnabas had, he had no evidence of this so unquestionable, as to allow him to run so great a hazard, as taking with them one who had once abandoned them. Nor, even if convinced on this point, could he deem it prudent to take with them on so trying and important a mission, and to exhibit as a faithful servant him whose desertion the churches had witnessed. However sincere might be his repentance before God, however it may re-establish him there, it could not with men, who see not the heart. His presence would be a stumbling-block, rather than an assistance on such a journey. Besides, Mark having been the especial pupil of Peter, and therefore having no doubt, followed him, and Barnabas in the late concessions at Antioch, Paul

had very prudential grounds for his unwillingness to have him together with Barnabas on this journey. He could not be sure that he might not have them both opposed to him on a similar and still more critical occasion. His former desertion, however, was the main objection.

Since they were both men of ardent temperament, open-hearted, and generous, so as to conceal not one thought, nor one feeling from each other, the debate was warm between them : but from this very reason it diminished not their friendship, nothing was held back, and kept rankling in the heart. It was their very grace in Christ which produced the sharpness of contention between them. They might otherwise have avoided the dispute, by readily complying through indifference to its subject, by assuming the mask of outward courteousness, by specious professions of charity, and may for a short time have exhibited peace where there was no peace. Discord would then soon have festered in their hearts into dislike, and dislike into hatred, and finally war would have flamed forth, fierce irreconcilable war. But they were not the children of this world. Their zeal for the cause of Christ forbade any compromise on worldly considerations. Their unfeigned mutual love, beginning and ending in their Redeemer, forbade any disguise of the heart. The contention itself was but the mutual opening of this. Their clash of words was but as the noise of removing of bars, of opening of locks and doors. As soon as all was open, and they were freely admitted to the inmost recess, the contention ceased. That it was no quarrel in the worldly sense, is clear from

the consequences;—their friendship did not fail. So far from it, that Mark, who had been its cause, was afterwards taken by St. Paul into his service, and treated with a father's affection. Barnabas very probably yielded the point ; still, after what had passed, it was prudent to separate. After all, they were in the flesh, and their very spirituality bade them guard against its weakness. So that their separation was the strongest proof of their affectionate friendship. They would not risk its interruption ; still less would they risk any detriment to the holy cause in which they were engaged. The effect of all this upon Mark must have been powerful indeed. What a quick spur must it have been to his good resolutions. Perhaps, from that hour he became the man, who was worthy to be called by St. Paul, his fellow-labourer<sup>1</sup>, and sent for him in the moment of perilous trial, as useful to him for the ministry<sup>2</sup>.

On agreeing to this separation, they divided the round of visitation between them. St. Paul took the upper part, having with him Silas, going through Syria and Cilicia, and, northward still, and on new ground, through Phrygia and Galatia, until he had commission from the Holy Ghost to pass into Greece, (a memorable day for Europe)! Barnabas, taking with him Mark, sailed as before for Cyprus, and thence probably visited the sea-coast of Pamphylia ; but there the narrative of Scripture leaves him. If he returned to Antioch, it was not for any permanent abode, since it is evident from St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians<sup>3</sup>, that Barnabas, like

<sup>1</sup> Philem. 23.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 11.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 6.

himself, was journeying, and founding, or visiting churches, and still maintained a practice which he had begun with him, of earning his livelihood by the work of his own hands. According to tradition he testified to the faith of Jesus Christ by his death.

Barnabas is the only instance given in the Gospel of one of the tribe of Levi becoming its minister. We are told, indeed, that a great multitude of the priests believed; but one of the sacred tribe, who should stand forward as a preacher of the Gospel, was evidently a more signal mark for the persecution of the unbelieving brethren than any other; at the same time, a priest or Levite, had more both of worldly prejudices and interests to overcome before he could embrace the Gospel, in which his sacredness of rank was lost, and he was one and equal with fishermen, with tax-gatherers, with Greeks, and with Scythians. We must consider this in estimating the character of Barnabas. He cannot but have been open to conviction, faithful to his trust, bold and straightforward in the cause of truth, and confident in God, who, like him, set at naught all his carnal prepossessions, and flung himself, with all his worldly goods, at the feet of the Gospel. He was an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile. He was worthy of being the friend and associate of Paul, and the title which he obtained from the apostles, shows that he had a mouth and wisdom, which the adversary could neither gainsay nor resist. He was a Levite, but not such as he that passed by the poor wounded Samaritan. He poured spiritual wine and oil into the wounds which the great way-layer and robber of the soul had made. He was a Levite,

but no unreflecting minister in God's temple, busy among vessels of silver and gold, and brass, in a house of senseless stone and timber. He had exchanged a material house and service for a spiritual, a perishable for an everlasting, the figure for the substance. He was now an inspired minister of the living temple of the Church of God, which is built of lively stones, even of his saints, and on the foundations of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. He now ministered about vessels of the Holy Ghost, and assisted at the sacrifices of clean and contrite hearts, which were looking to redemption through the sacrifice once offered of the Son of God<sup>1</sup>. Such a Levite was he. He is the spiritual father of the spiritual tribe of Levi. May his children ever strive after his likeness, and fulfil their appointed ministry of the Church of God with all faithfulness, with all grace of the Holy Ghost, with every part of their service directed to their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, the great offerer of the one and only sacrifice, the efficacious intercessor of the one and only mediation.

<sup>1</sup> See Epist. Barnab. § 16. The question of the authenticity of this Epistle belongs not to a work like this. It presents a curious instance of the inward and outward evidence being at variance, as ascribed to Barnabas the apostle.

THE END.

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